NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 546 NEW YORK, JUNE 15, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

THREE AGAINST FIFTEEN

—OR—

PATSY'S SPLENDID STRATEGY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."

"Quick, Foster!" Patsy called out. "There are four men who will burn up if we don't save them; get them out and turn the horses loose."

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Three Against Fifteen;

OR,

PATSY'S SPLENDID STRATEGY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

COZINE'S MYSTERIOUS DANGER.

It was Sunday morning. Nick Carter, Chick, and Ten-Ichi were seated at the breakfast-table when Patsy entered the room and took his chair in silence; that is, in silence save for the usual morning greeting, and, although the others chatted together quite merrily, Patsy did not enter into their humor at all.

And this was an unusual thing for Patsy, for as a rule he was the most loquacious of them all.

Nick, who knew each one of his assistants almost better than they knew themselves, watched him covertly, but made no remark about his preoccupation.

When the morning meal was finished, however, and they arose from the table together, Patsy remarked:

"Chief, before you begin with your paper, may I have a word with you, please?"

"Certainly, Patsy. Come along up to the study. I was going there anyhow;" and to the others he added: "I'll join you in the library presently, lads;" for it was their habit to sit in the library together until church-time Sunday mornings, always.

"Now, Patsy, I suppose you want a leave of absence, don't you?" smiled the detective, when the study door had closed behind them. "Wasn't that a special-delivery letter that came to you this morning?"

Patsy smiled somewhat sheepishly; but he replied promply:

"Yes, chief. It was a special-delivery letter from Cozine Marincroft—from Ardsley, near Philadelphia."

"I guessed that much, Patsy. Is she in trouble?"

"Will you read the letter for yourself?" was Patsy's reply; and he passed it over to his chief, who read aloud, as follows:

"'DEAR PATRICK: I write this in great haste, hoping that you will receive it to-night or in the morning at the latest. I am frightened. I am terrified. Is it possible that Lucile Maynard has escaped from prison again? Or, if she has not escaped, do you suppose that she has the power to reach out of her prison cell to wreak vengeance upon me and others? And, again, why should she seek to harm me? Oh, dear! I am surrounded by difficulties and terrors which I do not understand, which I cannot see, and which are therefore the more terrifying. Don't

think me silly; you know I am not that. You know also that I am not easily frightened. But now I am terrified. Do you think that Mr. Carter would let you come over here for a few hours to see me? Please ask him; and come if you can. And come at once if it is possible. Please give him my kindest regards, and also the other members of the household, not forgetting dear Mrs. Peters, who was so good to me.

"COZINE MARINCROFT."

There was a frown upon the detective's face as he put the letter down.

"Why is it that a woman can never be direct?" he asked. "If Cozine had used up the same number of words in telling us what was the matter, we would know what to do."

"As I read the letter," replied Patsy, "she says quite plainly that she doesn't know what *is* the matter. That is what has frightened her. Something threatens her and she doesn't know what it is."

"Humph!" said Nick.

"May I go? Can you spare me?"

"Of course you can go. I was only turning over in my mind the idea of going with you."

"I don't think that is necessary. I can call you up over the phone if——"

"Yes. I know. What time is it now?"

"Eight o'clock."

"There is a train on the Reading road at ten; and that is the one you should take. You have loads of time. I wonder what Cozine means by that reference to Lucile Maynard?"

"That is what puzzles me," said Patsy. "If she has escaped again we should know about it, don't you think so?"

"I don't know about that. They weren't in any haste to tell us about it the other time. It it hadn't been for Johnnie Coogan we wouldn't have found it out until it was too late—at least to have saved Cozine."

"Well, I think——"

"Sit down at the telephone, Patsy, and call up the chief of police of Boston. We will ask him, or whoever we can get, at headquarters."

Patsy grinned while he seated himself at the telephone; but he did not take the receiver from the hook at once. Instead he said:

"They don't like us any too well there since I gave Watson that thrashing, chief. What's the matter with calling up the warden, directly, and asking him about Lucile? We'd have the information at first-hand then."

"Do that."

While they were waiting for the connection to be made Nick remarked:

"I think it is nonsense to suppose that she could have made a second escape. And in so short a time at that. It was only a week ago——"

"It will be two weeks to-morrow, chief."

"By Jove! So it will."

"A lot can happen in two weeks."

"There is your call, Patsy."

Patsy put the receiver to his ear and called the usual hello; and then:

"This is Nick Carter's office. Can I speak with the warden, or his assistant, please?"

"I am his assistant," came the reply. "What can we do for you? Are you Carter, himself?"

"No. I am Patsy; but Mr. Carter is standing here beside me."

"Eh? So you are Patsy, are you? The chap who gave Watson the thrashing. Say, that was a good one. When you are in Boston again come in and see me. I may have something to tell you that will be of interest. That fellow Watson is no good on earth. He came here posing as an ex-Scotland Yard man, but my private opinion is that he's a crook. However, what is it that you want of me, Patsy?"

"Before I tell you that," said Patsy, with sudden inspiration, "tell me what is Watson's first name?"

"His full name, as we know it here, is Alexander Archibald Watson. He should have been a poet with that name, eh?"

"Sure. Now give me your name. I don't happen to know it."

"I'm just plain Pat Giblin. Same name as one of your ex-cops in New York."

"Say," said Patsy, "is everybody in Boston named Pat?"

"Well, there are a few of us rustling around. Now, what is it that you want to know?"

"I want to know about Lucile Maynard."

"What about her?"

"Well, for instance, has she escaped again?"

"Has she *what? Escaped?* Not on your life! Wha. put that notion into your head?"

"A letter that we received here this morning. Have you seen her yourself within the last twenty-four hours?"

"No; but I'm sure that she's here all right."

"Would you mind going to her cell while I hold the wire, just to be dead certain?"

"Great Scott, don't you suppose I *know?*"

"I would consider it a favor if you would do as I ask. She's a slippery article, as you know. She fooled you once; she might do it again."

"All right. Hold the wire."

There was a wait of ten minutes after that, and then Giblin's voice came over the wire again.

"That you, Patsy?"

"Yes."

"Lucile is here all right. I told her you were asking after her health, and she said a funny thing to me in reply."

"Did she? What was that?"

"She said, 'Tell Patsy to look out for his friend who looks like me. I dreamed last night that she was in danger.' I asked her what she meant by that, and she replied: 'It was only a dream, but I am superstitious about my dreams.' What do you suppose she meant by that, Patsy?"

"I haven't an idea; but all the same, Giblin, I wish you would do me a favor."

"Sure. What is it?"

"Will you keep a sharp eye on her for the next week or so? And will you try to talk to her yourself once in a while? Question her about that dream and then write me about it, will you?"

"Sure thing."

"What you said about Mr. Alexander Archibald Watson interests me, too. If you should happen to pick up any interesting information about him, will you include it in your letter?"

"I will."

"I think that is all. Good-by."

Patsy turned to Nick Carter.

"You heard one end of the conversation," he said.

"And I can surmise the rest of it," replied Nick. "It is certain that the Maynard woman has not escaped. What was that 'funny thing' that she said to Giblin?"

"She told him to tell me that she had dreamed that Cozine is in danger, and warned me to look out for her. It is rather an odd coincidence, don't you think so?"

"Perhaps."

"Nick"—Patsy very rarely called his chief by his given name, and never unless he was deeply preoccupied—"you don't suppose that that woman is trying to work harm against Cozine, even from her prison cell, do you?"

"No, Patsy, I do not. If Cozine is in any danger, which I somehow doubt, it does not come from Lucile Maynard this time."

"That fellow Watson might——"

"Oh, bosh! Watson has other things to think of than such a thing as that."

"He would like to get square with me—and with Cozine, too."

"Possibly. However, if you are going to catch your train, you had best be moving."

Patsy caught his train, and shortly after noon he was walking rapidly through the principal street of Ardsley toward the home of Cozine Marincroft, which is one of the imposing residences of that locality.

He waited a long time after he had rung the bell before any one came to respond to it; but at last the old butler came to the door and peered cautiously out upon him; but he remembered Patsy as having brought his young mistress home two weeks before, and he opened the door wide for his admittance; and there was an expression of genuine alarm upon his face as he did so.

"Where is Miss Cozy?" he exclaimed before Patsy could utter a word. "She went to meet you, sir, at the station, two hours ago. Ten o'clock it was. She thought it strange that you should send——"

"What in blazes are you talking about?" demanded Patsy. "Where is your mistress?"

"She is gone, sir—gone to meet you—two hours ago, sir!" was the astounding reply.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

It seems incredible that a person can seemingly disappear off the face of the earth within a distance of less than half a mile in the middle of a bright day in the midst of a community where that person is well known—but that is what had happened to Cozine Marincroft.

When Thompson, the butler, informed Patsy that she had gone to the station to meet him, and that she had already been gone two hours—that is to say, she must have started for the station in Ardsley at about the same time when Patsy was boarding the train in Jersey City to go to her—he knew at once, naturally, that something was wrong.

He had sent her no message, and she would not have started for the station to meet him unless she had received a message of some sort from somebody representing him—or, rather, purporting to do so.

But she had received a message; the butler said so.

She had even expressed her opinion to the butler that she thought it strange that Mr. Garvan should have asked her to go to the station; but she had gone, nevertheless.

Gone where?

Patsy wasted no time in hurrying back to the station and in questioning the employees who were there.

There was not one of them who did not know Miss Marincroft well by sight; there was not one of them who had seen her that day.

The distance between the station and her home was rather less than half a mile. The way was along a thickly populated, much-traveled thoroughfare. True, there was not so many people abroad on Sunday morning as on other days, but still there were always pedestrians and vehicles along that street.

Moreover, that *was* Sunday morning, and ten o'clock was nearly church-time. Church-goers—and there was always many of them in Ardsley—would be passing along at that time.

Patsy was so deeply puzzled that he was nonplused. He did not know which way to turn, or what to do next. Try as he might he could not find a single person who had seen Cozine Marincroft that morning.

He returned to the house and called Thompson into the parlor with him.

"Now, Thompson," he said, "I want you to begin at the moment you left your room this morning to come downstairs, and tell me everything that has occurred, no matter how trivial it is, from that time until you opened the door to my ring."

"Yes, sir. I'll try."

"Well?"

"I rose at half-past five. I always do, summer and winter. It was a quarter to six when I came down-stairs. Miss Cozine is also an early riser, and she came down at half-past six. I remember noticing the time."

"Very well. What then?"

"She put on her jacket and hat and went for a walk. That is her habit, almost every day, when she is at home."

"How long was she gone at that time?"

"About an hour. I could not say exactly."

"And when she returned——"

"When she returned she had a bunch of roses in her hand which one of the neighbors had given her. She has been quite nervous of late, sir; but this morning she seemed quite happy. I think, sir, it was because she was expecting you."

"Thank you, Thompson. Go on, please."

"We breakfasted at eight. That is, of course, I mean that Miss Cozine and Mrs. Martin did so. You know, sir, that Mrs. Martin has been in the family as long as I have—since before Miss Cozine was born. She is like a mother to Miss Cozine, and always sits at the table with her."

"Yes. I know."

"They breakfasted at eight, and were just rising from the table when the message came."

"Ah! The message. What sort of a message was it?"

"A telegram, sir."

"Where is that message now?"

"I do not know, sir. I think Miss Cozine must have put it in her purse or destroyed it. I have looked for it, but I cannot find it. But I can repeat word for word what it said, for she read it aloud to Mrs. Martin in my presence."

"Well, tell me what the message contained."

"It said: 'Please meet me at station at the ten o'clock train;' and it was signed with your name, sir."

"My full name?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where was the message from?"

"I supposed from New York; but I do not know about that."

"What remark, if any, did she make about the message?"

"She thought it strange that you should ask her to meet you at the station; but she added, laughingly, that you generally had a reason for what you did, so she should go."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir, save that she was very restless until it was time to go to the train. She went out upon the lawn two or three times, and into the flower-garden. Then she went into the conservatory and picked those flowers that are there on the table, and at twenty minutes to ten she left the house."

"Did you see her go out?"

"I did."

"Did you see her turn toward the station?"

"No, sir. I merely saw her leave the house. I did not see her again after the front door closed behind her. I was busy at the time."

"She is well known—by sight, I mean—in Ardsley, isn't she?"

"Everybody knows her well, sir—men, women, and children; and everybody loves her, too."

"Thompson, I could not find a person who had seen her on the street. She did not go to the station, or at least she was not seen there, or on her way there. That message was a fake, for I did not send it."

"It is all very mysterious, sir," was all that the old butler could reply.

"Where is Mrs. Martin?"

"She is in her room, sir. She always spends most of her time in her room now."

"And where is her room? At the front of the house?"

"Yes."

"Where it commands a view of the approach to the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has Mrs. Martin been informed of the disappearance of her mistress?"

"No, sir. I thought it best not to alarm her."

"Then do me the favor to go to her room now and ask her—but do not alarm her—if she noticed Miss Cozine when she left the house to go to the station."

The butler was absent about ten minutes, and when he returned there was a puzzled expression on his kind old face.

"Yes, sir," he said, "Mrs. Martin saw Miss Cozine start down the walk toward the street. She says that she just happened to glance out of the window at the time and saw her. I asked her how far Miss Cozine was from the house when she saw her, and she said that she was just in front of the steps. I should take that to mean—judging from the view from Mrs. Martin's window—that Miss Cozine was probably fifty feet from the house when Mrs. Martin saw her."

"But she did not watch her all the way to the street, eh?"

"No, sir. I asked her that. She said she was busy fixing up her room—she always prefers to do that herself,

although Miss Cozine has tried to get her to let the maids do it—she was busy fixing up her room, and she turned away from the window. It was only a glance that she had of Miss Cozine."

"Anything more? There seems to be something else on your mind."

"Why, Mrs. Martin said a funny thing; or rather a strange thing about it."

"What was that?"

"She said: 'Cozine didn't have to go to the station after all, did she?' I asked her why she said that, and she replied: 'I thought I saw Mr. Garvan coming up the walk toward her at the same time I saw her go out; but I am not sure.' You see, sir, Mrs. Martin thinks that Miss Cozine is here now and that you are with her. I did not enlighten her."

"It is all very strange," mused the young detective.

"Yes, sir; it certainly is. Is there any way to account for it, do you think? Nothing could have happened to her, near her own door-step, on a Sunday morning."

"Why, it would seem not, Thompson, and yet something has happened or she would be here."

"I have thought, sir, if you would permit me to make a suggestion——"

"Go on."

"That it might be well to telephone to some of the houses where she is in the habit of calling. It is possible that she may have gone to one of them, don't you think so?"

"No, Thompson, I do not. She was expecting me, and she started to the station to meet me, lured there by a false telegram. She would have gone nowhere else of her own free will."

"But who is there who would have any object in luring her away on a Sunday morning? It would seem to me, sir, if you will pardon the impertinence, that if—if any one wished her harm, which is difficult to believe, the attempt would have been made at some other time. I should feel greatly worried, sir, if I did not feel sure that she will return, presently, and explain all about it. You see, sir——"

"Well?"

"It is evident that Mrs. Martin saw a man coming up the walk from the street at the same time she saw Miss Cozine going down the walk. Now, I have thought that possibly somebody in the neighborhood might have been taken sick and sent for her—or something like that. They often do send for Miss Cozine when things are the matter, and she is always ready to respond. Even her engagement at the station with you would not keep her from responding to such a request as that."

Patsy was silent; but presently he said:

"Go about your duties, Thompson, whatever they are. I must be alone for a time to think the matter over. I think I will go outside on the veranda, but I will leave the door on the latch so that I can return without disturbing you."

The old man left the room, and after a moment Patsy passed out at the front door and stood with his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets, looking down the walk which led to the street.

With his eyes he calculated the distance to the street as approximately three hundred feet, and the walk itself was in the form of the letter Y; that is to say, for a distance of one hundred feet from the piazza it led directly toward the street, but there it branched at an oblique angle in either direction. The spaces on either side of the first part of the walk were filled with rose-bushes, and a hedge ran directly across the width of the yard at the point where the arms of the Y branched. Beyond the hedge, outside the arms of the Y, and continuing all the way to the street, there were forests of shrubbery, and also on each side there was a small group of native white birches. Between the arms of the Y was the lawn. The effect from the street was very pleasing and beautiful.

Patsy stood there for a long time studying this view, and at last he murmured aloud:

"Cozine disappeared, somehow, before she reached the street. She never reached the street at all, for if she had done so she would have been seen and recognized by somebody. The mystery, or its explanation, lies within three hundred feet of where I am standing, and by Heaven I'm going to find it."

CHAPTER III.

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD WISDOM.

Given an effect, there is always a cause; and wherever there is a cause, it inevitably leaves some trace behind it.

Patsy began his investigation systematically, as he had been taught always to do, by his chief. He started down one side of the standard of the letter Y, examining the ground with great care as he proceeded; examining every inch of it from the edge of the walk, which was of concrete, to a distance of three feet from it.

The ground was soft there. If a foot had been pressed upon it that morning the imprint would remain and he would find it; at least, that was his opinion.

He went as far as the hedge without result; there was no footprint of any kind to be discovered. He began then at the hedge and returned along the opposite side of the walk.

The result was the same; there was nothing.

He returned then to the hedge and stood between the ends of it in the middle of the walk where the arms of the Y branched off.

"Which is the most likely arm of the Y for her to have followed?" he asked himself now. "The one which

leads more nearly toward the direction of the station, of course. It is there, too, that the shrubbery is the thickest. Now, let me stop and consider for a moment.

"Thompson said that when Mrs. Martin caught a glimpse of Cozine she must have been about fifty feet from the front steps. Thompson is no fool and has probably approximated the distance fairly well. He was where he could step to Mrs. Martin's window and look for himself. It follows, however, that Cozine had not reached the hedge; was, in fact, about half-way to it from the front steps.

"Mrs. Martin, at the same instant, caught a glimpse of a man approaching up the walk—it does not appear which arm of the Y that was, but I will assume for the present that it was the right arm, looking from the house. Now I will go back and stand about where Cozine must have been when Mrs. Martin saw her."

He did so, and then he looked first along one of the arms and then along the other one.

Here he uttered a little exclamation of surprise, for he discovered that from that position, owing to an unevenness in the height of the shrubbery, a person approaching the house along the right arm of the Y would not be visible if near the point where the white birches grew on that side; but on the opposite side, along the left arm of the Y, such a person would be in view the entire length of the walk.

He lighted a cigar and stood very still, thinking.

"I must assume," he mused, "that the telegram was a fake all through; that it did not even come through the telegraph-office. I will verify that idea one way or another, later. But, if I assume that, then the person who sent the fake message must have been here prepared to receive Cozine when she came out of the house.

"Now, he could not have known the exact time when she would come out; he could only approximate it. As a matter of fact, it requires about ten minutes to walk from here to the station. She was told to be there at ten, so it was safe for him to assume that she would start from the house between twenty minutes to ten and ten minutes to ten.

"People were going to church then. The man could not stand idly in front of this residence, particularly as he was a stranger, without being observed—and he did not wish to attract unnecessary attention.

"Now, I am to assume that he had calculated upon concealing himself somewhere until she should appear, and having fixed her earliest appearance at twenty minutes to ten—and that was the time when Cozine actually left the house—he appeared at that moment; and that explains how that one glance of Mrs. Martin's saw both figures.

"*But*, if he turned into the right arm of the letter Y at the same moment she came out of the house, he saw her, while in all probability she did not see him. More than likely she was buttoning her gloves; women usually are when they start to go anywhere.

"Now, he did one of two things; he either stopped still in his tracks and waited for her to approach, or he jumped aside into the shrubbery, or among the birches, and kept out of her sight until she was quite near him."

Patsy ceased his musings abruptly and started rapidly down the right arm of the Y; and then he began another search along the outside of the arm of the Y for tracks upon the soft earth, or upon the grass—he felt that if there were tracks there he would find them.

But there were none. He searched thoroughly, and he was positive that there were none.

Still insistent, however, upon making the search thorough, he crossed over and devoted the same energy to the other arm of the Y—and with the same result.

If anybody had stepped off that walk that morning other than upon the lawn between the arms of the Y there certainly was no trace of such a thing—and Patsy did not believe it had happened.

"That shows that when the man saw her leave the house he stopped and waited for her where he was—probably fifty feet in from the street along the right arm of the Y.

"Now, I am certain that she did not pass down that street. She was not seen and she would have been had she done so. So it follows that there must have been a vehicle of some sort in waiting just out of sight from the piazza of the house; in other words, it must have stopped just at a point where the shrubbery would conceal it.

"There arises now another question—several other questions:

"If there was a vehicle, what sort of a conveyance was it? I can answer that; an automobile, of course, for that would be the only thing practical for this sort of work—and if I am reasoning this out correctly there should be tracks of automobile wheels near the curb, at or near the point I have indicated. I will look there presently.

"Now, if there was an automobile there, how was she induced to enter it?

"There can be only two answers to that question. Either there was a man in that automobile who had been made up to represent me fairly well—for she was expecting me—or the man who met her on the walk made it appear that I had sent the motor for her."

He walked rapidly down the path to the street and went directly to the spot where he had decided that an automobile would have stopped had there been one.

The wheel-tracks were there.

They were plainly visible along the edge of the roadway.

"So," he murmured. "I am right thus far, at least. Now, how was she induced to enter the car? They would not have dared at such a time to have chloroformed her

and carried her to it. If such a thing had happened it would have been noised all over this community before now. Cozine is too brave a girl to have been forced into the car on her own feet without making an outcry. How was it done?

"I must return to the original proposition; either some one inside the car looked like me, or it was represented that I sent the car for her from the station, perhaps.

"But now"—looking again at the tracks—"when the car started away it went up the road and not in the direction of the station."

He remained in such deep meditation after that that he did not notice the approach of a boy, who came and stood silently beside him, regarding him with absorbing earnestness; and he was startled when presently he heard, directly beside him, a soft greeting.

"Hello, mister!" the boy said; and there was something wistful in the manner of saying it.

"Hello, my lad," replied Patsy; "whose boy are you?"

"I'm Richard Tucker's boy, please, sir. My father is a stone mason and I'm 'leven years old."

"Is that so? Well, you're a fine, big boy;" Patsy was somewhat absent in his remarks, for he was still thinking upon his problem.

"Yes, sir. Don't you think that I am big enough to ride in an automobile, please, sir?"

"Why, yes; I should think so—if you had one to ride in."

"But I haven't, sir, and that's all the trouble. And I thought maybe, sir, that some day you would give me a ride in yours, if you please. I have never been in one, but I see them go by with boys no bigger than I am riding in them, and I want to ride in one awfully bad; so if you would please let me ride in yours some time——"

Patsy began to sit up and take notice—figuratively speaking.

"What makes you think that I have got an automobile, my lad?" he asked, studying the bright, young face before him, with its wistful eyes, and the Sunday-school books under the lad's arm.

"Why, I saw it!" exclaimed the boy.

"Did you? When?"

"This morning, when I was going to church."

"Where?"

"Right here where we are standing."

"But how do you know that it was *my* automobile that you saw?"

"Because I saw you sitting inside of it."

"Are you sure that it was I?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"What makes you so sure about that, my lad?"

"Why, I saw you, I tell you. You were sitting inside while the other man went to meet the lady—and your name is Patsy, isn't it?"

"It is, my lad. But how did you know that?"

"Because I heard the lady say, 'Oh, Patsy, I'm so glad you have come!' And then you said something that I didn't hear and she said something more, and then the automobile whisked away so quickly that you couldn't think."

"The lady got into the car, did she?"

"Why, yes, sir, don't you remember?"

"Never mind. You reply to my questions as I ask them, and I will promise that you shall have a ride in an automobile to-day, and a long one, too. Tell me where the lady came from?"

"She came out of that house there. Her name's Mer'n-croft, and I heard you call her cousin, so I guess she must be your cousin; and I saw you put your arm around her and hug her up close when she got in, only the back of the automobile had a folded top on it, and I couldn't see a thing after that—only just the top of your head."

"Couldn't you see the top of her head, too?"

"No, sir. It kinda fell over onto your shoulder, I thought."

"And which way did the automobile go?"

"Up that way."

"What color was it?"

"Black."

"Can you tell me how the other man looked? The one who was on the front seat?"

"There were two men on the front seat, sir."

"Can you describe them to me?"

"They were just ordinary looking men. The one who stayed in the front seat all the time had on big glasses, so's I couldn't see his face, but the other was a real nice looking man with a black mustache."

"And the automobile was black? You are quite sure of that?"

"Yes, sir. I know what make it was, too. I have learned a lot about automobiles since I thought I'd like to have one. This one was a Packard."

"Isn't the Autocar factory in this town? Do you know where it is, and can you take me there?"

"Yes, sir. It is only a little ways from here. I'll show you; but it's Sunday, and there won't be anybody but the watchman there. But I know him, too."

"All right, my lad. You take me there, and if the watchman can find the superintendent for me I'll hire an automobile and take you to ride with me; and we will try and see if we can not catch up with that Packard. Oh, if you had only noticed the number of that machine."

"But that is just what I did do, sir. I always do, so that I'll remember the ones I have seen before. This one had three numbers on it, and I wrote them all down in my little book."

"Bless you, boy! You deserve to have an automobile of your own."

CHAPTER IV.

GARRITY TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME.

We need not go into particulars of Patsy's talk with the watchman and subsequently with the superintendent of the Autocar works at Ardsley. It is sufficient that he succeeded in securing a car; that then he drove back to Cozine's home and acquainted the butler with his plans, and that thereafter he sought out the father of the boy and persuaded him to accompany them, so that young Richard could have his first automobile ride.

For their way, as the boy had pointed it out, lay toward Philadelphia, and it was necessary that the boy should have somebody to bring him home again; it was uncertain when Patsy might return to Ardsley. But Richard's father was willing enough to go when Patsy told him that he would gladly supply the money for their return, and more too; for the boy had earned it by the information he had imparted.

And Richard had taken down those three numbers exactly as they had been displayed upon the car; and when Patsy looked at them and copied them he knew that they represented licenses in three States—New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

"It ought not to be difficult to follow a big Packard like that, particularly when I have the numbers," he thought; "and it is a much surer game to follow the trail than it would be to try to head it off."

Boys are strange and incomprehensible creatures; they do strange things and take wonderful notions about some things.

This boy had a passion for automobiles—a passion which he could gratify only by studying their appearance and trying to remember if he had seen certain ones before; or by remembering one when he saw it a second time.

His father told Patsy he knew every motor that was owned in the town, its horse-power, its number, and the name of the man who owned it.

His delight when he was placed on the front seat beside Patsy was pathetic. He was as still as a mouse and as silent as a tomb; only his big eyes and his tightly compressed lips told of the excitement he was under; and Patsy wisely left him to his own thoughts until they were well on their way toward Philadelphia.

Patsy belived that he understood the situation now.

From the very beginning—from the moment he read Cozine's letter that morning—he had suspected that Alexander Watson was at the bottom of her troubles; and that belief had been strengthened by what Giblin had said to him over the telephone.

Patsy knew that Watson was an adept at disguises; he was almost as expert at them as Nick Carter himself, and, therefore, it had been an easy matter for him to make his face up so like Patsy's that Cozine would be deceived.

But Watson was much taller than Patsy, and therefore he had not dared to leave the car so that she could see him standing.

He had remained in the car while one of his men went to meet her; went to meet her in order that she might be *forced* into the tonneau in case she offered resistance or became suspicious.

And the instant she was inside the car Watson had thrown an arm about her and held her; perhaps he had choked her; at all events he had in some manner prevented her from crying out, and he had held her while the automobile sped away—held her down out of sight in the body of the car, in all probability.

Eleven-year-old Richard Tucker had supplied a great deal more information than he guessed in what he had imparted to Patsy, for in addition to supplying the necessary clue for which Patsy was searching he had given the young detective the assurance—figuratively, of course—that the abductor was Watson, and that the ultimate destination was Boston.

While Patsy was rushing the Autocar toward Philadelphia, he was rapidly mapping out his future campaign.

He knew, for one thing, that the Packard could not go far without a supply of gasoline.

The car had doubtless come over from New York since Saturday evening. Perhaps Watson had been wise enough to fill his tank just before he went to Ardsley after Cozine; but the probability was that he would seek more of it in Philadelphia; certainly in Trenton.

But in these days gasoline can be purchased anywhere. One no longer has to apply at a garage for it. Cozine could be stupefied with some drug and kept so while the tank was being filled.

"But," Patsy argued, "there is only one direct traveled road for automobiles between Philadelphia and New York, and it will be strange if I cannot put up some job to overtake that Packard before it gets to New York—*and that I must do, for Cozine's sake.*"

When he arrived in Philadelphia he went straight to the big garage on North Broad Street, which is known as the Automobile Palace, and asked there if anything was known of the Packard he was after.

There was. It had stopped there that morning from seven to nine o'clock, cleaned up, and filled the tank. Nothing had been seen of it since. No destination had been mentioned. Three men had been with it.

"One looked very much like you; might have been your brother, only he was taller," was the information. "The others? Well, one was short and thick-set, with sandy hair, and the other looked as if he might be the owner; a black-mustached gentleman," etc., etc.

Patsy used the telephone booth here, and called up Nick Carter, in New York.

To him he related all that had happened during the day, and he gave the numbers that the boy had supplied him with.

"Will you send Chick and Ten-Ichi out to see if they can head them off?" he asked of his chief. "I cannot get a warrant here for them to-day. It is Sunday and it is Philadelphia. You know what that means."

"Yes," replied the detective; "but I'll tell you what you can do."

"I wish you would."

"Go to the city hall to police headquarters and see if you can find my old friend Garrity. I think he should be on duty there about now. Ask him to telephone word to everybody he knows along the line and say that you will give a reward of five hundred dollars to the man who will put that machine out of commission somewhere along the road."

"That's a good idea."

"They will have to stop somewhere; probably they will make several stops—for gasoline, for food, and, more than all, for drinks. A clever man at one of those places and Garrity knows them all—can put their machine out of commission long enough for you to catch up with it, and do it without letting them suspect that it was anything but an accident. That is what you want done."

"Good! I see the game."

"Tell Garrity that you will give the man who will accomplish it five hundred dollars—and, say, leave the money with him. You've got enough with you, haven't you?"

"Yes. Plenty."

"To that, Patsy. In the meantime I will do some telephoning on my own account, and see if I can't do something from this end. Also I will go out myself, with Chick, in the Peerless. It will be strange if we don't head them off somewhere. Those numbers are a great help. Are you sure they are right?"

"Positive."

Patsy backed out of the garage and hurried to the city hall, where, as Nick had thought would be the case, he found Garrity.

Garrity is one of those iron-faced men whose expression never changes, and he looked like a stone image while he listened to what Patsy had to tell him.

"They have got a big start of you, Pat," he said then. "They must be beyond Trenton by this time."

"Yes. If they are hurrying. But I have an idea that they will take it easy."

"Why?"

"Well, if the observer is Watson—and it can be no other, since he was so free with the use of my personality—he can have no idea that I was due in Ardsley to-day. He knows that he got away without being seen. It was all done very dexterously, and probably he argues that Miss Marincroft will not be missed——"

"Who's that you say? *Marincroft?*" Garrity started to his feet in some excitement.

"That's what I said," replied Patsy.

"Miss Cozine Marincroft, of Ardsley? Man, is that who you mean?"

"Yes."

"I'll help you. Her father was the best friend I ever had. He got me on the force. He always stood my friend. And is it his girl they are stealing away? Curse 'em! I'll fix 'em if there's a way to do it! And if so be there isn't, by the powers I'll take the trail myself and I'll kill with me own two hands the man who does an injury to that girl!"

"Thank you, Garrity! Shake. Here's the five hundred. It is for the man who will stop that machine until I can catch up with it."

"And, by heavens, I'll add five hundred more to it out of me own pocket, Patsy. I wish I could go with you this day!"

"I think you can do more good right here in this office with the telephone at your own elbow, Garrity."

"I think so too, when all is said. And I'll burn the wires till they're red hot, Pat."

"I believe you."

"Here! Take this list—wait a minute till I check off some of the places. There you are. Stop at each of those places that I have marked, and ask for telephone messages from Garrity; and each time you stop, whether you hear from me or not, leave a message to be telephoned to me from there, saying what time you passed through. That will let me know where to catch you. We've got a good system along that line now. We all work together. Now go, and let me begin on those wires. Nick is startin' out from the other end, you say?"

"Yes."

"I wish he'd think to call me up before long—and I think he will. We'd be squeezin' the Watson chap between the two of you then. Get out now. Cozine Marincroft's an angel and she has gone riding with the devil, but we'll catch him, Pat. We'll catch him."

Little Richard Tucker was just waking up from his dream of bliss and beginning really to enjoy himself when Patsy returned to the car.

"I am going right through to Trenton now, Mr. Tucker," Patsy said to his father, "and I want you, for the boy's sake, to go with me. You can get a train back from there, and as young Richard has earned twenty dollars to-day I think you can afford it."

"Twenty dollars? How is that, sir?"

"For taking down those numbers; for the information he gave me."

With one more stop in the city long enough to supply himself with cigars, the start for Trenton was made.

"There is one thing that I guess I forgot to tell you, sir," said the lad, after they had covered about half the distance.

"What was that?" asked Patsy, interested at once.

"You know that one man went up the path toward the big house, while the other two—the one I thought was you, and the one who ran the machine—remained in the automobile?"

"Yes."

"Well, the man in front turned around and spoke to the man I thought was you, and I could hear what he said, but not what the other man answered."

"Tell me what he said, Richard—everything."

"He said, 'If we can make this girl listen to reason, it's dead easy;' and then the other man said something, and then *he* said again, 'If we can't do it one way, we will another; but, anyhow, with this girl we've got Lucile's fortune cinched.' Then the man who looked like you spoke again, and then the man in front said, 'Oh, you can have your own way with her. All we want is part of Lucile's dough.' And then they both laughed.

CHAPTER V.

NEWS OF THE ABDUCTORS.

It is sometimes wonderful how much light a very small thing will throw upon a subject.

Patsy understood now at least one more reason why Watson should wish to obtain control of the person of Cozine Marincroft.

True, there were other reasons, for Patsy had no doubt that Watson had conceived a passion for the beautiful girl, and meant to win her if he could—by foul means, since it was impossible that he could do so by fair ones.

But there was another and even more potent reason.

The extraordinary resemblance existing between Cozine and the woman in the Boston prison, Lucile Maynard, explained that.

Lucile Maynard's career had been one of crime always, and she had amassed an immense fortune. These men remembered how perfectly Cozine had once personated [illegible] and the [illegible] that it would [illegible] again. And if she could do it, and could be prevailed upon to do it willingly, there was nothing to prevent them from obtaining that fortune to divide among themselves, since Lucile was in prison, soon to be tried for murder, and was therefore in a measure helpless.

[illegible] control of the [illegible] remained part of the spoil at last.

"If we can make this girl listen to reason it's [illegible]

[illegible]

"'Oh, you can have your own way with her. All we want is part of Lucile's dough.'"

The horror of Cozine's position, riding with those men, stirred Patsy so that he gritted his teeth in impotent rage.

His whole mind was fixed on the road ahead of him. The entire force of his will stretched out before him like fingers reaching for the throats of the men who had done this wrong, and who would do infinitely greater ones if they were not overtaken.

The ultimate destination was, of course, Boston; but Cozine must be rescued long before Boston was reached. She would be lost forever unless Patsy could overtake her now.

Patsy looked up at the telephone and telegraph wires that ran along the roadside and wondered if Garrity was talking over them. Oh! how he wished that he could hear what was being said; and just then a quiet voice beside him said:

"Mr. Patsy—I don't know your other name, you know—is that young lady your sweetheart?"

Patsy looked down at the lad and grinned.

"How old did you say you are, Richard?" he asked.

"'Leven."

"Well, you are the oldest man for eleven years that I have ever seen. You are about seventy, Richard, in some things."

"Do you think so? My teacher says that I am old for my years."

"You certainly are."

"Is that young lady your sweetheart, Mr. Patsy?"

"Bound to get an answer, aren't you? What do you mean by sweetheart?"

"I mean do you love her and does she love you?"

"Gee! But you're a corker! I can answer one side of that question, Richard, but I don't know anything about the other side."

"I suppose you mean that you love her, but that you don't know whether she loves you or not. Is that what you mean?"

"For perfect sincerity and frankness, my lad, you take the cake."

"*Is* that what you mean?"

"Well, we will say that it is something very much like that."

"Why don't you know whether she loves you or not, Mr. Patsy?"

"For the same reason that I don't know whether you like me or not."

"Why, sir, you *know* that I like you."

"No, I do not. You haven't said so."

"Well, you haven't asked me."

"Now, my son, you have stated the case exactly."

"Then why don't you ask her?"

"Maybe I have been afraid to do so, Richard."

"I don't believe that. I don't believe you are afraid of anything. People who look at others the way you do are not afraid. I suppose you are bashful."

"Well, by jingo, you are the first one who ever accused me of it. Richard, what are you going to do for a living when you are a big man?"

"I'm going to build automobiles."

"And I suppose you will always remember this ride with me to-day, won't you?"

"Yes, sir. Indeed, I will. And when you come to Ardsley to marry Miss Mar——"

"Hold on there, Richard! Hold on tight now! You're going a leetle mite too fast, my son. Don't you understand, Richard, that those bad men stole her away to-day, and that we are now chasing them and trying to rescue her?"

"Yes, sir; and you will catch them, too. I know it."

"I wish I did. Tell me how you know it?"

"Because right always triumphs in the end, and wrong is only victorious for a time. You are in the right. But I have got another reason. I can see it in your eyes that you are going to catch those bad men."

"Bless you, Richard! I'll take you as my good prophet as well as my good angel—for you have been that this day. And now, my lad, we're coming into Trenton. Were you ever here before?"

"No, sir."

Patsy ran the machine directly to the place where Garrity had told him to apply for information, and stopped out.

As he did so two stalwart-looking men came forward, and one of them asked:

"Is this Mr. Patrick Garvan?"

"Yes," replied Patsy. "What is it?"

"Here is a telephone message from Major Garrity; and he told us to offer our services to you, if you would like to have either or both of us go along with you, for the rest of the trip."

"Please wait a moment until I read the message," said Patsy. It was as follows:

"Your man have telephoned to Jamison's roadhouse, near Sound Plains, for supper, to be served at eight o'clock to-night. I think you will overtake them there. I have heard from Nick, but have not had a chance to give him this information. I have a man at Jamison's, or will have one there before Watson gets there. Two men will offer to go with you. You had better take one or them. Anyhow. . . . Garrity."

Patsy looked up from the message with a smiling face.

"That makes me feel better," he said, "but Heaven only knows what that poor girl has gone through with already. I will take one of you men, and pay you well. I should like both, but I want to save weight. Which one will go?"

"Either or both, sir," replied the taller of the two. "My name is Dave Harker. Perhaps you had better take me. Garrity told me to go if you only wanted one."

"All right, Dave. Will you get me some sandwiches and some bottles of ginger-ale? I have just remembered that I haven't eaten since early morning. Be quick, for I don't want to delay."

And when he had gone on his errand, Patsy helped Richard from the automobile, and when he put him on his feet on the pavement, he gave him a twenty-dollar bill.

"That, Richard," he said, "is to pay you for your services to-day. They have been very valuable to me. I suppose it is the first money you ever earned, so I advise you to put it in the bank, and by the time you start that automobile factory, it will have grown almost as much as you. Good-by, Richard. Good-by, Mr. Tucker. Here is enough for your fare home, so that Richard won't have to break his twenty. There is the station, right over there."

But Richard ran back again when he was half-way across the street, and he called out:

"Mr. Patsy, when you go to Ardsley again, won't you please come and see me?"

"I certainly will," replied Patsy. "Good-by, my boy. You'll make automobiles some day, and I'll bet on it."

Harker came out with the sandwiches, and then climbed into the machine.

"Can you operate her?" asked Patsy.

"Like a book. Yes, sir."

"Then do it while I take a bite to eat. And make all the time the law will allow, but don't get held up by any of these country cops. If you do, I'll shoot you."

"All right, sir."

And so the endless miles began to roll beneath them while Patsy munched on and thought and thought and thought.

It had been two o'clock when he left Ardsley, three before he pulled out of Philadelphia, and it was six now.

"At eight o'clock Watson will be at Jamison's," he mused. "It will be ten, at the best, before I can get there. Probably they will be there by seven. That will give them three hours. How dare they stop there with their prisoner? What excuse will they make? *Ah!*"

It came to him in a flash just what excuse Watson would make. It was strange that he had not thought of it before.

"Watson is an officer of police—at least, he is accredited as one. He carried a badge and possibly other credentials—forged, of course. He will show those. He will represent Cozine as a dangerous prisoner.

"That will be his game, sure. I wonder if they will lock her up in a room by herself, or will they force her to sit at table with them?

"But I forgot—I forgot what Garrity said in his mes-

they got there; and Garrity will see to it that no harm comes to little Cozine. I know that's what he said. Harker?"

"Yes, sir?"

"How quick do you think we can make the run to Scotch Plains?"

"If all goes well, we should do it in something less than four hours, sir. If it wasn't for the strict way in which they enforce the law over here now, we could do it much faster, but I think it best to be on the safe side, and not get held up. These local constables are awful jealous of their powers."

"I know that only too well."

"I think we can make it before ten, sir."

"You handle the machine well, Harker."

"I ought to. I have been at it from young, and I know every inch of the Arrowbee. It is my favorite wheel as it is said."

"Do you know what machine I am chasing?"

"I do now, sir. I could I had known it when I saw it pass through."

"What! Did you see it?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you see a lady in the tonneau?"

"I did, sir."

"Did she seem to be all right, Harker?"

"She did, so far as I could tell. She was sitting up very straight and silent, and I noticed that she had her eyes closed. I don't know, sir, that maybe she was sleeping, or was in a faint, or something. If she moved or spoke. Or maybe she was not conscious. I wish I had known that when we passed. Something would have happened. But we'll catch them, sir, don't you worry. I'd rather have Garrity behind me, in a case of this kind, than a whole regiment."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROAD TO THE RESCUE.

[illegible] Garrity had marked on the list, but at each place the only passage he received was:

"Nothing new to report. They are making toward Jamison's. I might have stopped them at Princeton, but you wouldn't have had that the officers knew you will have at Jamison's."

And again:

"[illegible] Will arrive in Princeton before they are. He'll wreck that machine if [illegible] right if they try to start out before you get there."

[illegible] Garrity [illegible] Patsy had started to be sent to Jamison's.

"Garrity will look after the young lady. There's no fear. He's a whole team, with a horse behind and a dog under the wagon, when he gets started. That's you have with you, Harker, is a good one and all right. He would fight a buzz-saw if you asked him to do it. And he's straight."

And again, still farther along the road:

"Glad to hear that you are getting along so well. If your machine doesn't break down, you are all right. I have said Foster that when you get there you will stop one, 'Grab, nothing here.' He'll show up then, and show [illegible]. He will call you [illegible] later."

At this place Patsy left a message which caused Garrity if he had heard anything further from Nick Carter, and on the next page of information he received this reply:

"Have heard nothing further from Carter. Don't know what to make of it. Maybe his machine broke down somewhere along the road. I have sent him word that the party is to be at Jamison's, but don't know whether he received it or not. Will make an effort to locate him and let you know at the next place."

And here again Patsy left a message to be transmitted to Garrity. It was this:

"Please be sure that Foster looks out for Cozine. I am worried about what they may do with her, or to her, after they arrive at Jamison's. Everything depends upon her being properly protected until I can get to her. It is my opinion that Watson will [illegible] her and pass her off as a prisoner. I have found out more of their plot since I saw you."

To this, at the next station, he received the following reply:

"I have instructed Foster according to your message. You may depend upon him. He will shoot if necessary, and I haven't the slightest doubt that he could lick the bunch if they rouse him. However, get along the road as fast as you conveniently can. Don't get held up by any of the country coppers. They are nasty, and would hold you."

"Garrity is a great man in his way, Harker," said Patsy, during one of the intervals in their ride.

"You bet he's great. He has one accomplishment which I hold to be about the greatest a man can have."

"What is that?"

"He is true blue to his friends no matter what stands in the way. Now, this young lady, we are working——"

"Yes?"

"Her father was an old friend of Garrity's. They were both poor when they were boys, but Mr. [illegible] a lot of money and became rich very fast. I have known Garrity [illegible]

not have gone to his friend and got the last dollar he had if he needed it. Garrity remembers it, too."

At twenty minutes past eight o'clock they stopped at another of the marked stations, and here they found the following message:

"Watson and others have arrived at Jamison's place. You were right about the prisoner business. The young lady seems to believe that they are all officers, and that they somehow have the right to arrest her and take her back to Boston. She has been given the parlor room on the second floor, and her dinner is to be served to her alone. The men have been drinking, and there is an incipient quarrel among them. Nothing from Nick."

Here, for the second time, it became necessary to replenish the gasoline, and while that was being done, Patsy and Harker managed to stow away a few bites of supper.

When they returned to the Autocar to resume their journey, Harker took the time to examine everything thoroughly, even getting down upon his back in the road to do so.

[illegible] the machine was in splendid condition, and presently they started on again, now with a little more than an hour and a half, as they had timed it, between them and the end of their journey.

Before leaving, Patsy sent the following message to Cozine:

"Have Foster, if possible, convey to Cozine the information that I am after her and will rescue her. It will give her courage. Is she handcuffed, or has she suffered any indignity? Please find out."

It was a quarter-past nine when he received a reply to this at the next marked station. It was:

"Foster thinks he'd better not try to convey message. Woman party might get suspicious. He says, as far as the young lady has suffered no indignity. She seems stupefied, but whether from having been drugged, or from terror and despair, he cannot say. You are almost there now, and this will be my last message to you until you call me up from there. My advice is to go in silently. Leave your machine somewhere back on the road if necessary. F. says that there is another party there now, and that the two have gotten together. He can't tell if they are old acquaintances or not. Keep your eyes open and be ready for a scrap, for it is more than likely that you'll have one before you are through. Nothing from Nick."

"We have got to be cautious with that, Harker," said Patsy, as he read aloud.

"Yes. Well, it's enough."

"Have you got a gun, Harker?"

"Sure thing. Two of them."

"That's all right. We may have to use them."

"It's more than likely."

"Do you know this man Foster?"

"No; but I know of him."

"Who is he?"

"He used to be on the force in Philadelphia. Got fired for something. I don't know what it was, but Garrity has always stood his friend. He'd go to the devil for Garrity."

"He is a man to be trusted, then?"

"He's a man that Garrity can trust, and I reckon that's enough for us now, don't you?"

"Yes. It would seem so. Do you know this road perfectly, Harker?"

"Like my mother's dooryard."

"Shall we leave the machine back somewhere, and go to the road-house on foot?"

"I think it would be better. I know a shed where we can run her in out of sight."

"And how much farther have we to go before we get to that shed?"

"It will take us about ten minutes now."

They were silent after that, and the big Autocar sped onward through the darkness like a bird; for the night had turned out to be very dark. Heavy clouds hung low in the sky, and rain was threatening, although none had yet fallen.

At last, after an interminable time, it seemed to Patsy, Harker turned the Autocar from the road into a lane, and presently turned her again, and brought the machine to a stop under a shed, as he had said he would.

Patsy pulled out the plug and thrust it into one of his pockets, and then, with Harker for guide—for Harker seemed to know every turn and twist of the road and the entire region around there, they started on a rapid walk for the road-house.

"You see," said Harker, "if we had run the car farther, everybody inside that old shebang would have known that we were coming. As it is, we can approach without letting anybody be the wiser."

"All right," said Patsy. "Now be silent, and let us keep a lookout for Foster. I wish I had thought to get a description of him."

"You've got one, Mr. Garvan, in that name Bobbie."

"True enough."

"And besides, Foster will be on the lookout for us."

They approached the house, and had almost reached the piazza—which they had decided to skirt—when a man stepped out from behind one of the trees and confronted them.

He stood with folded arms, in utter silence, and his appearance was so sudden and so unexpected that, for a moment, Patsy was silent also; and then he exclaimed softly:

"Hello, Bobbie boy?"

"Hello, Bobbie boy?" was the immediate reply; and

the man stepped nearer, bending forward and peering sharply into Patsy's face.

When he appeared to be satisfied with the scrutiny, he said rather shortly:

"I'm Foster. Garrity sent me. I'm after that five hundred, mister."

"Garrity has got it for you if you do the work. He told you that, didn't he?"

"Yes. I only meant to say that I intend to earn it."

"That's the talk. Now tell me about the young lady."

"She's in that room up there in the corner, where you see the light."

"Is she all right?"

"Well, as far as I know, she is. I think she's dopey, or scared to death."

"Have they got her tied, or anything like that?"

"I heard one of them say—the one that looks like you—I heard him say, a little while ago, when I was listening outside the window, that he had a handcuff around one of her wrists, and that the other handcuff was fastened to the iron bedstead."

"The infernal scoundrel!"

"He has given out the impression that she is an escaped prisoner from Boston. He says that she is implicated in that murder case with Lucile Somebody."

"Maynard."

"Yes. That's the name. He says she was an accomplice in that crime, and that she escaped from jail and fled to Ardsley."

"Never mind all that. It is all rot, of course. Couldn't we get up to that room and get her safely out of it without their knowing it?"

"No; they have got a guard over her. A big nigger that works here. He is to get five dollars for his job."

"Then the only thing for us to do is to go in and lick the bunch, Foster."

"I reckon that's about the size of it, mister."

"Garrity told me something about a second party joining Watson here. Do you think they are all together, or are they strangers to each other?"

"They're all one bunch, or I'm no judge."

"And how many are in the second party?"

"Five."

"Then that makes eight all together. Well it must be done, anyhow."

"You're off on your count, mister. There's the nigger, the landlord, the bartender, and two waiters, not to mention the cook and one or two men from the stables. That seems to me to foot up about fifteen that we've got to tackle."

"Well!" demanded Patsy impatiently, "are you going to help me or must I do it alone?"

"Alone! Why, I'd rather fight that bunch than eat dinner."

CHAPTER VII.

THREE AGAINST FIFTEEN.

"Where is their automobile?" was Patsy's next question of the man Foster.

"It's out yonder, under the sheds."

"The first thing for us to do, then, is to cut off their line of retreat. We must put the machine out of commission."

"Say, mister, didn't I tell you that I intend to earn that five hundred? I've been doctoring that machine already, and I didn't do very much to it, either; but, all the same, if they should start up, they wouldn't go far."

"What did you do?"

"I just merely and nacherly pumped all the gasoline out of their tank. About all they've got left is what is inside the carbureter, and maybe a pint or so in the bottom of the tank. I reckon maybe they could run two or three miles, but not farther than that. I left them just enough so's they wouldn't discover that they were out until they got too far away from the house to replenish. I thought that was the best way."

"Decidedly the best way. You're all right, Foster."

"That's what Garrity says, although there are some that says differently."

"What about that other party of five? Did they come in an automobile?"

"Sure."

"Where is that one?"

"Out there alongside of the other one. It's a Pierce Arrow."

"I think we ought to fix that in the same way as the Packard."

"It's already fixed, mister. I don't do things half-way."

"And there are no other machines here, are there?"

"No; except yours. I don't know where you left that. But say!"

"Well?"

"I've got all that gasoline cached. Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to fill your tanks with it?"

"Oh, my machine is all right. I've got enough to run me as far as I will want to go until I can get home. I don't want to take the time for that now."

"All right, mister."

"Now, where is that telephone over which you have talked with Garrity?"

"It's in that little shanty up in the corner. But we don't want to use that now, do we?"

"No. Can you get me around somewhere, so that I can get a view of the party? I'd like to look them over a bit before we open the ball, and now that we are low on the ground, we do not need to hurry."

"No, we don't want to hurry. We might just as well let that bunch swallow a little more of Jamaica rum, which is distilled poison—and they're hitting it up. Come along. I'll show you."

He led the way around to the rear of the building, to a place where he had placed a box upon another one, and, pointing toward them, he said:

"If you'll climb up there, mister, I reckon you'll see about all you're looking for."

Patsy mounted silently to the top of the boxes, and then, by standing erect, he could just peer in at the window beyond which the party of men were seated.

For a moment he studied the group—eight men engaged in a game of poker—and then as silently he descended and rejoined his companions, leading them away again into the darkness.

"You were all right, Foster," he said then. "It is really all one party. They must have agreed to meet here, for I recognize nearly all of them. The two men who traveled here with Watson,I have never seen before, but I know that they are the ones who came with Watson, from the description that the boy gave me. Three of the other party I recognize as belonging to the gang that Lucile Maynard once had around her. They were with her in a house on Washington Heights, in New York, when Lucile was arrested the last time. They were committed to escape at that time."*

"Nice bunch, ain't they?" asked Foster.

"It's a tough outfit, Foster. But for the present they are pretty much engaged over that game they are playing. I think we will have time to do another thing that I have in mind."

"What is that, if I may ask?"

"You spoke about one or more men out at the stables, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"I think we had better round them up and corral them. How many are there? Do you know?"

"There are two, anyhow—maybe three."

"Well, we will gather them in first."

"Wait a minute, mister. When you looked through that window did you see anything of the landlord? Of old Jamison?"

"No; there were only eight men in the room at the time."

"Then we've got to move carefully. More than likely he's moving around the place somewhere. Just follow me, and keep in the deepest shadow."

He led Patsy and Harker by a devious, winding way to the rear of the stables, and they quickly discovered that it was well they had used care, for, as they glided through the rear door, they heard voices in the harness-room.

"Wait here," said Patsy peremptorily; and then he glided swiftly forward until he stood within a few feet of the open door of the harness-room, and could plainly hear all that was being said inside. The first words he heard were evidently spoken by the landlord, in continuation of something he had been telling them. They were:

"——and he said it was worth a five-spot to each of you if you'd keep good watch. He don't want to be surprised, that's all. He says 'taint likely that he has been followed, or that anybody has any idea at all what road he took, or where he is; but, all the same, he don't want nobody droppin' down on him unawares; so if you hear a choo-choo coming, it's up to you to run inside and let me know instanter."

"We'll do that, all right, Mr. Jamison," replied a gruff voice. "I guess, between the three of us, we ought to keep good watch."

"Then another thing, Jim."

"Yes, sir."

"If anybody should come down on them, there's likely to be a scrap; and if there is one—well, it's to my interest that we should win out. This bunch has got the dough, and they're willing to pay for services rendered. You understand?"

"Sure thing."

"I guess that's about all."

"Say, Mr. Jamison, what about that purty girl? Is she really a prisoner, or is it some old fake game that they have put up?"

It was evident to Patsy that the landlord winked his eye then, for the other three laughed; and then Patsy heard him say:

"I ain't asking no questions, Jim. The man Watson is an officer of the law. He has showed me his credentials and exhibited his badge. He has likewise demanded my services in the name of the law. I guess it's up to me to give 'em; eh?"

"Sure thing."

"Now, keep your eyes peeled and your ears open. I'm going back to the house."

"Are you settin' in at that game?"

"Nope. I'm letting them have their own way, and serving all the wine and booze they want to swallow, and it takes Tim and me both to tend bar for 'em."

He passed out from the harness-room through another door; and after a moment of silence, Patsy heard the man who was called Jim say:

"I'll step outside for a minute and have a look around. You two can go ahead with that game of 'setback,' and I'll be back in a minute."

Patsy drew back sharply when he heard Jim's step approach where he was standing; but even then it was a wonder that the man did not discover him, for he passed so close to where Patsy was standing that he might easily have touched him.

But Jim had come from a lighted room into the darkness, and was, therefore, blinded for the moment. To this alone Patsy owed the fact that he was not seen.

Jim turned toward the front of the stable, and Patsy glided after him as silently as a shadow.

It did not concern the young detective in the least that Jim was almost twice his size, and was, to all appearance, a giant in strength. Patsy knew a way to overcome him and silence him if he could only get him far enough away from that harness-room so that his companions would not hear the sound of the struggle.

Jim stopped for a moment upon the threshold of the huge stable doorway, and seemed to be listening, and then he stepped out into the night.

Like a cat Patsy crept after him, moving so silently that the man in front of him did not hear a sound or a suggestion of one; and then, when the man turned under the sheds where the two automobiles were standing, Patsy made a sudden rush forward and performed a trick of ju-jutsu which Ten-Ichi had taught him.

It is called the "back throat-hold," and a David might easily overcome a Goliath with it if the opportunity were offered as it was offered to Patsy now.

It is done by springing upon the intended victim's back, by striking him sharply with the right knee over the kidneys; by throwing the left arm sharply around under the victim's chin with a swinging, backward stroke, and by striking with the edge of the right hand a sharp blow directly over the victim's right temple. And all this is done at precisely the same instant.

It requires a great deal of practise to acquire it, but, once acquired, nothing human can withstand it, and were a man as strong as an ox, and his assailant a mere boy, the victim would sink down senseless under it upon the instant, and he would have made no sound whatever.

And this was precisely what happened.

Jim did not know what struck him. He did not have time to know what had happened. It was as if lightning had fallen out of the clouds upon him, and he lay there in the darkness, stretched upon his back, while Patsy coolly tied him hand and foot with a rope that he dragged from one of the automobiles beside him.

He opened the tool-box of one of the machines, and found a big cloth used for wiping the machinery, and this he forced into the man's mouth, and tied behind his head, thus effectually gagging him.

And then he dragged him over into one corner of the shed, where there would be no danger of his being seen, and, having looked once more to his bonds, to make certain that he was secure, he coolly left him and returned to the stable.

He was pleased to find that Foster and Harker had obeyed him literally, and were waiting where he had left them.

"There are only two of these fellows left now," he said them quietly.

"We saw you follow the big fellow out at the door," replied Harker. "What did you do to him?"

"He is senseless, and he won't come to for half an hour, at least," replied Patsy. "And he is bound and gagged so that he can do no harm and make no noise if he should; and now for the other two."

"All right," said Foster. "Give your orders. I guess you're capable of being general in chief of this outfit."

"I don't think that a litle noise in the harness-room will do any harm," replied Patsy. "I don't want to lose any more time, either. I will go around to the outside door; you two get in front of this inside door which is open."

"Yes."

"The other door is a glass one. If you look through the room, you will be able to see me at the other door. I will open it, and enter suddenly, and, when I do so, you must both make a rush. The thing is to down them without noise. Come on, now."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRISONER IN THE UPPER ROOM.

When Patsy opened the outside door of the harness-room and entered, it was evident that the two men who were playing cards there supposed him to be Jim, returning, for neither of them so much as raised his head; and the next instant one of them sank to the floor like a wet dish-rag from a blow under the ear from Patsy's fist, while the other one was seized from behind by Foster, and choked into insensibility before he could make a sound.

"Gee! But that was easy!" chuckled Harker. "But where do I come in? I didn't have to raise a finger."

"You can help us strap these fellows up and gag them," replied Patsy. "After that we will bring the big one in and stow all three away together, in one of the stalls outside. A few of those harness-straps will be about the thing."

"I'll go and get the big fellow while you are fixing these," said Foster. "Where is he?"

Patsy told him, and Foster disappeared, but presently he was back again, carrying the two hundred or more pounds of dead weight as easily as if it were nothing at all. Patsy looked at him admiringly.

"You are a powerful man, Foster," he said.

"Too much so sometimes," was the reply. "That was what got me into trouble in Philadelphia. I forgot my strength, and hurt a chap more than I intended to do."

The three prisoners were carried to the rear of the stable, and put into an empty stall, and then a little more straw was thrown over them; enough to conceal them from view, but not sufficient to create any danger of suffocation.

"Now, general, what is to be the next move?" asked Foster.

"I'll tell you. We will now go around to the house,

under the window of the room where the young lady is a prisoner. How many feet do you suppose it is from the ground to the roof of the piazza?"

"Well, at a rough guess, I should say it is fourteen feet—maybe fifteen."

"Just about that," assented Harker.

"Harker," said Patsy, "did you ever do any athletics?"

"Some. I think I see what you are up to. We can do it, too."

"Foster, can you hold both of us on your shoulders?"

"Eh? Both of you? Just like mice—if you can get us there."

"Come along, then. You, Foster, will take your stand close to the piazza. Harker will step upon your shoulders from the floor of the piazza, and will steady himself by clinging to one of the posts. Then I will climb up over both of you until I am standing upon Harker's shoulders. From there it will be an easy matter for me to get upon the roof."

"Right! But what are you going to do when you get there, if I may ask?"

"I wish to see for myself just how the young lady is situated—and I can see through that window, I think. If I can, it is feasible when I get there, I'll tackle the nigger, and we'll try to get Miss Marincroft out of the way before the fight begins. I don't know what I will do until I get there and see for myself."

"I want to tell you one thing, mister."

"What is that, Foster?"

"That nigger is bigger than I am, and, as far as I know, stronger. He'd be a bad one for you to tackle unless you could take him unawares, like you did that fellow Jim. But if he should see you first——"

"Well?"

"We'd have the row on our hands all at once, and the worse part of it would be that it would happen right in the room where that young lady is a prisoner—and she might get hurt. You see, if the nigger should give the alarm, the whole bunch would rush to that room in a manner."

"I know that. Nevertheless, I want to have a look at that window."

"Come on, then. I'm ready to do my part—but if the nigger sees you, and goes for you, take my advice, and shoot him dead. He's a bad nigger, anyhow. The very worst I ever knew."

They filed out of the stable silently, and cautiously approached the front of the house, where a light gleamed in a side one window—the one which Foster had pointed out as being the room wherein Cozine was confined.

Foster picked up Harker and set him—that is, his hands upon the edge of the floor of the piazza as easily as if he were a child; and then Harker stepped upon Foster's shoulders, facing the building.

He seized the post of the piazza with one hand, to steady himself, and, with the other, he reached down for Patsy.

Then Patsy stepped into Foster's big right hand, and so, lifted by one man and pulled upward by the other, he climbed easily to Foster's shoulder.

Next he stepped his foot into Harker's right hand, and then, with a quick spring, he seized the edge of the roof of the piazza, resting both feet upon Harker's shoulders.

He was now rather more than breast-high with the roof of the piazza, and it was an easy matter for him to draw himself silently upon it, where he proceeded to crawl on his hands and knees across the shingles toward the window.

The shade of the window had been drawn down; but it was an old shade, that had seen much service, and at some time somebody had torn a jagged hole in it. Through this Patsy was enabled to obtain a very fair view of the interior.

Cozine was seated in an upholstered chair, which had been drawn up close against the foot of a brass bedstead. Her right arm rested upon the arm of her chair, close to the brass frame. Around her right wrist a handcuff had been closely locked, while the other one of the pair was locked around the metal post of the bedframe.

She was seated so that she exactly faced Patsy as he peered through the slit in the curtain. Her head was resting against the upholstered back of the chair, and her eyes were closed, as if she were sleeping.

Over against the door, at the opposite side of the room, tilted back in his chair and engaged in smoking a freshly lighted cigar, was a huge negro—so huge as to be almost a veritable giant.

He was wide-awake enough, too. His wicked eyes were gleaming savagely and lustfully, and he blinked them toward the girl in the chair, for only the top of her head could have been visible to him, where he was seated; but he sat as motionless as a statue, save for the occasional winking of his eyes and the steady puffing at the cigar he held between his teeth.

Then Patsy gave his attention for a moment directly to the window through which he was peering, and he saw, to his dismay, that it was securely fastened; realized that he could not hope to gain admittance to the room in that way without smashing in the entire sash, and he knew that such an act must rouse the whole house, and bring, as Foster had said, the scene of the fight that would follow directly into the room where Cozine was seated.

He saw that attack from that quarter would be futile; he saw, moreover, that a big revolver was lying upon another chair, close to the negro's hand.

He was about to turn away, to descend again to the ground, when the negro rose from his chair against the

door, and strode across the room until he stood almost directly in front of Cozine.

"How's de little missy now?" Patsy heard him say.

Cozine opened her eyes, looked up at the negro for an instant, shuddered, and closed them again without speaking.

"How's de little missy now, I ask yo'?" repeated the negro angrily. "Yo' shore has got a tongue in that purty haid o' youahs."

"Please go away and leave me alone," said Cozine, opening her eyes again.

"Yo' is jes' a little white lily, missy, an' I shore is sorry fo' yo'," said the negro; and Patsy thought he detected something genuine in the negro's voice. "Mebby I ain't so bad as yo' think I is, missy—mebby not. I is a bad nigger, shore 'nuff, but I ain't so bad as to let dat white trash down there do nothin' to hurt yo', I ain't. I's watchin' yo', to see dat yo' don't escape, an' uh case I's got to do it; but I's watchin', too, so's one uh dat bunch kain't do nuffin' to hurt yo'."

"Of, if you would only assist me to escape from them, I would bless you all the days of my life!" gasped Cozine, recognizing, as Patsy had done, something genuine in the negro's utterance. "I would pay you well for it, too, if only I can get back to my home."

"I kain't do that, missy, nohow," said the negro, shaking his head. "But I ain' goin' to 'low nobody to harm yo' as long as yo' is healt'; so yo' jes' go to sleep an' rest. I's keepin' watch, I is."

"I thank you for that much, at least," murmured Cozine, gratefully. "Will you tell me where I am, please?"

"Yo' is at Mr. Jamison's road-house, near South Palms, missy. It's a slow kind place, too, sho'. Dere ain't no law dat goes, heah."

"Oh, if you would only help me gain my liberty. Couldn't we get out at that window? Couldn't we climb down from the roof of the piazza and get away before those men would miss me? I will pay you a thousand dollars—a thousand dollars, if you will take me safely to my home."

"Kain't do it nohow, missy. I is shore 'nuff sorry, too. Yo' see, missy, yo' is a prisoner ob de law, and three of those men down-stairs is sure 'nuff officers. I kain't do it nohow. Yo' jes' go to sleep an' rest. Yo' see, missy, I thought mebby yo' might be afeared uh me——"

"I was."

"Mos' people is afeared uh me, missy; but, golly, I wouldn't harm a hair uh yo' purty haid fo' nothin'. I jes' wanted to tell you dat."

"I thank you. Will you tell me your name?"

"Patsy, missy. Is dere anything else I can do for yo'?"

"Will you give me a drink of water, please?"

"I suttinly will."

He crossed to a table where there was a pitcher and a glass and poured out a goblet full of the liquid; and gave it to her as tenderly as any one could have done.

She thanked him and he returned the goblet to the table; and then without more words he resumed his chair against the door.

Patsy withdrew as silently as he had come. He was amazed at what he had seen and heard. The appearance of the negro entirely belied all that he had said, and yet Patsy realized that he had been sincere about it.

A moment later he was upon the ground again, and all three of them walked away toward the stables once more, while Patsy in a low tone told them what he had seen and heard.

"Well!" exclaimed Foster. "You can do me up in a bundle and send me away by express after that. Anybody had told me that there was any good in Pete Marsters I wouldn't have believed it. But don't make any mistake, Mr. Garvan. He'll fight for his side just the same when the time comes. But——"

"Well?"

"I'd sorter to hate to hurt him much after that—Schehch!"

They had approached quite near to the stable door by that time, and suddenly they heard the unmistakable voice of the landlord calling aloud:

"Jim! Mike! Rags! Where the devil are you all? Is that the way you keep watch? Where are you, I say? Jim!"

"Wait a minute," whispered Foster, and he strode forward swiftly toward the harness-room, which Jamison was at that instant entering; and as Jamison went in at one door Foster passed through the other one, so that they met face to face almost in the middle of the room.

"Hello, Jamison! How are you?" said Foster, pleasantly. "That's a nice bunch of gazabos you've got in there, isn't it?"

"Where in thunder——" began Jamison, hotly; but he got no further, for by that time Foster was within reach of him. And his huge fist shot out like a stone hurled from a catapult, and with such force did it strike Jamison's jaw that his head flew back with a jerk, his feet left the floor, and his body, as if propelled by the same catapult, went crashing against the partition of the room. Jamison fell to the floor an inanimate, motionless mass of senseless flesh.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROAD-HOUSE FIRE.

"That's four out of the way," remarked Patsy, sententiously. "I hope you didn't kill him, Foster."

"Look and see, will you? I'm a little bit afraid to do it myself. I hit him rather hard, I guess. There is an old grudge between us, and that is the first time I have ever had a fair crack at him."

"No; he isn't dead," said Harker. "We had better roll him up and put him with the others in the stall, hadn't you think so?"

Foster nodded; and Foster interposed:

"First, Harker, relieve him of his keys. We will want to get inside the house now, and he has supplied a way for us to do it."

"It won't be long before they will miss him in there," remarked Patsy, while Harker searched for the keys; and then the landlord was bound and gagged as the others had been, and was deposited with them under the straw.

"Say, which of you knows about the plan of the interior of the house?"

"I reckon we both do," replied Harker.

"Then give me a description of the ground floor, and how to find the stairs, and also the room where the young lady is."

Harker did so with careful exactness.

"All right," said Patsy, when he was through. "I think we will go inside now. I would like it mighty well if we could awaken them still more before we begin the final scrap."

"Maybe," said Foster, "if we wait around long enough we will. Still, I don't think that we have much to fear from the bartender and the two waiters. Without the landlord to boss them they won't amount to much. It's the others I'm most afraid of, notwithstanding what you have said and heard."

They had started toward the house and were halfway between the stable and the door by which they had planned to enter when it was suddenly thrown open, and a figure appeared, silhouetted against the light beyond it.

"Jamison!" called the man in the doorway. "Where in blazes are you?"

The three friends shrank back into a deeper shadow, for it was evident that the man in the doorway had caught sight of them, or had at least seen something moving; for he called out again:

"Who is that there? Is that you, Jamison?"

"No, it ain't!" growled Foster huskily, in reply. "It's Jim."

"Where is Jamison? Mr. Watson wants him. Come here a minute, will you?"

Foster strode swiftly forward without replying, for he saw now that exposure was certain unless he acted quickly and forcibly.

The bartender—for it was he—did not suspect that it was not Jim until Foster was close to him, but then he saw the difference and tried to leap away out of danger.

He made the effort too late, however, for Foster reached out one of his great hands to seize the man by the throat.

However, he only succeeded in grasping him by the collar, and then as he jerked the bartender toward him the latter uttered a loud cry of alarm, which rang through the house, and which might have been heard half a mile away through the silent night.

"Help! Help! Hel——" he called; and then Foster's fist caught him on the side of the head and knocked him senseless.

But the alarm had been given.

Patsy could hear an answering cry from within the house; he heard chairs shoved noisily back from the tables and the tramping of feet upon the floors, and then the banging of doors.

"Come on!" he called to his two followers, and leaping over the now senseless body of the bartender, he dashed through the open doorway into the house.

The door was at the side of the house. It gave upon a wide hall which crossed the house, intersecting the main hallway at the center. All this had been described to Patsy.

The room in which the poker-players were congregated was beyond the intersection of the two hallways, and, as we know, at the rear; that is, to Patsy's left as he entered.

And just as he dashed forward, followed by Foster and Harker, the door of that room opened and two men rushed out upon the scene.

The foremost of these two was the black-mustached one whom Richard Tucker had described; and the instant his eyes fell upon Patsy he called out:

"Hello, Watson! What in thunder is the matter out there?"

It was evident that for the instant he mistook Patsy for Watson—a fact which told Patsy that Watson had left the room temporarily and that this man supposed it

was he returning—and the mistake gave the young detective time to get within striking distance.

Patsy, as we know, is not yet very great in stature; but we also know that his muscles are like steel, and that Nick Carter speaks of him as the quickest man he ever knew about some things.

He was quick now.

The words of inquiry had barely escaped the lips of the black-mustached fellow before Patsy's fist landed, and the man staggered back against the other one who was behind him, and the two against the remaining members of the party, who now crowded the doorway.

The man whom Patsy struck slipped to the floor, unconscious, but there was plenty of fight left in his friends, who now realized that they were attacked and that they must defend themselves.

But Patsy's rush had been closely followed by Foster and Harker.

When he hit the man of the mustache, they were close behind him; and when the doorway was momentarily filled with the card-players, Foster threw his huge body against them, striking out with his mighty fists at every head he could see.

And Harker was doing exactly the same thing, while Patsy was reaching under and doing what execution he could.

The result of it all was that during a space in which you might have counted five, rapidly, the doorway was blockaded; but then the men were forced back inside the room from which they had sought to escape.

There were only five of them now, for Watson was not there, Patsy had knocked one out, and Foster's first blow had put out another one.

But it was apparent that these five were men who were accustomed to fighting, and desperate fighting at that.

[illegible] for as Patsy leaped through the doorway into the room after them, a pistol was discharged almost in his face, and he felt a sharp shock and sting against his left shoulder.

But, wounded or not, it did not interfere with his activity, and he leaped upon the man who had fired the gun, seizing him by the throat and forcing him backward to the floor.

[illegible] shots, and then the lamps were knocked from the chandelier over the table and fell to the floor.

Instantly there was an explosion of one of them, and blazing oil was scattered in every direction, and almost before one could realize it flames were shooting up on every side, and that with the men still fighting madly among them.

With a terrific effort Patsy tore himself away from the man he had fallen upon and sought to rise, to escape from that blazing room, which was now rapidly becoming an inferno.

But even as he gained his feet somebody struck him a crashing blow against the back of his head with the butt of a pistol, and he pitched forward, half-unconscious.

It was then, when he was only half-conscious, that he felt somebody seize him and lift him bodily from the floor, and the next instant he was hurled through the doorway into the hall.

It was the shock of this second fall that partly revived him.

He was able to stagger to his feet somehow just as Foster—who was the one who had snatched him out of danger—caught him by the arm and dragged him entirely to his feet.

The flames were now darting into the hallway. The inflammable material of the building needed only a spark to set it roaring, and already the fire was far beyond control and was rushing its way through partitions and ceiling to the complete destruction of the old, worm-eaten house.

Into the midst of that roaring furnace of the former card-room Foster now plunged again, and the next instant he staggered out again, blackened and scorched, but with Harker in his arms.

Patsy saw all this in a half-dazed way; and then suddenly the effects of the blow he had received left him.

He remembered Cozine.

He made a mad dash through the hall that led to the front door, reached the stairway, and ran up them while the flames, now spreading rapidly, seemed to pursue him.

It is wonderful how quickly a building of that kind, once started, can become a mass of fire.

When Patsy reached the upper hallway it was already burning, and tongues of flame were reaching out their fingers for everything they could seize upon and consume.

Patsy knew the location of the room he sought. Harker's description of the interior of the house had impressed him in that much.

Dense smoke filled the hall, and through the smoke flames shot out like arrows, but Patsy jumped through it all and reached the door he sought.

It was locked against him, and with a desperate effort, such as he had never made before, Patsy threw himself against it.

It resisted the first onslaught, but with the second, and when Patsy's clothing was beginning to smoke, it gave way and he fell with the door inside the room.

The room was empty. There was no one there, not even the negro.

When Patsy turned to make his escape, he saw that he was practically cut off from the hope of doing so by the way he had come, and he started for the window through which he had seen Cozine earlier in the night.

He seized a chair—the one in which the negro had been seated—and, using it as a club, he smashed it through sash and pane with one mighty blow, thus opening the way to freedom.

But the smashing of the window gave the flames an impetus, and it seemed to Patsy that a thousand tongues of intense heat darted after him as he sprang through the casement to the roof of the piazza without.

And then he saw that already the whole building was enveloped in fire.

A second jump took him to the edge of the roof, and he was in the very act of leaping from it to the ground when the sharp report of a pistol from some distance away came to him and he could hear the "zip!" of a bullet as it ground his ear.

The next instant he was rolling over on the ground, where he alighted after his jump; but he rolled over on this side and ran with all the speed he could muster toward the spot from which that pistol-shot had come.

But he had not taken a dozen steps before he heard the voice of Foster calling to him.

"Don't go that way," he called. "Wait a minute! I'll get you, Patsy!"

Then, for the first time, Patsy stopped to think, for the first time he saw that the flames had already spread to the stables, which formed an extension to the house and barn.

"Quick, Foster!" he called out. "There are four men in there who will be burned up if we don't save them. Let's get them out and turn the horses loose. Come! I think that Watson got away with Cozine before the fire started. But he can't go far, as we know. Where is Harker?"

"He is pretty badly hurt, but he'll pull through, I guess," was the reply.

All this was said while they were running toward the stable; and the next moment they had dashed inside together to save the four men who were bound and gagged in there, and also to save the horses.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAIL OF THE ABDUCTOR.

During the following half-hour Patsy and Foster worked like Trojans—and they succeeded in saving not only the four men, but also the horses, harnesses, and the rolling stock.

But that was all that was saved of Jamison's place.

When his bonds were removed, and he saw the havoc that had been wrought, he sat like one stupefied, looking upon the ruin of his place.

"Who did it, Foster?" he asked at last. "Did those fellows who had the girl with them set fire to my place?"

"No, Jamison. There was a fight. A lamp was overturned. You can see the result."

"Yes, I see it," he responded grimly. "Maybe it will surprise you when I say that I am not altogether sorry. I haven't lost much. Everything of value that I possess is elsewhere—and this place was insured for all it was worth and more, too. I have thought sometimes that I would set it afire. Why did you hit me the way you did, Foster?"

"Well, I had that old grudge for one thing. You did me dirt once, and I never forget such things. But besides that we wanted you out of the way. I suppose that Jim and Mike and Rags can look out for you now, can't they? We have got to leave you."

"Yes. I'll be all right. Only later I'll want your affidavit about the fire."

"You shall have it when you want it. You know where to find me."

"Yes. Say, was anybody burned up in there, Foster?" Foster started.

"I don't know," he said truthfully. "I hope not. I think not."

"The young lady—did she get out all right?"

"Yes. She escaped. That man Watson took her. We are going after them now."

"Wasn't she a prisoner of the law, Foster?"

"No; the man abducted her from her home."

"I suspected it. And you are going after her?"

"Yes."

"Then maybe I can give you a pointer. You know Bob Seaver's place, don't you?"

"Yes."

"It's about twelve miles from here. You know. I heard him say to the others with him—the ones that met him here—that he left something at Seaver's that he was going to stop and get in the morning. You and your friend needn't feel badly about the fire. I don't care a hang as long as the horses were saved. I'm rather glad of it. I can retire now with a good excuse."

And so they left him.

Harker, whom they had found time to make more comfortable, made little of his wound. He had a bullet through his body, but it was evident that it had not touched a vital spot, for he was quite cheerful.

"There is a doctor about a mile from here," he said. "I know him well. You can leave me there in his care, Patsy. I'll be all right in a little while."

"Don't forget," replied Patsy, "that there is a good fat sum coming to you out of this affair. I will send it to you through Garrity."

"That will be all right, Patsy, old fellow. I'm only sorry that I can't see the thing on through to the finish. But Foster will stick by you."

"That I will!" exclaimed Foster. "I like grit, and this young chap has got the clear article."

"I'll bring around the Autocar," said Patsy, and he hurried away.

Dawn was breaking when he returned with the car. Harker was lifted carefully into it, and the machine sped away toward the doctor's, which fortunately was on the road taken by the other two machines, for their wheel-tracks were plainly visible. The clouds that had portended rain the preceding night had spilled only enough to lay the dust, but it was sufficient to prepare an excellent condition of the road for trailing.

The doctor was at home and he received Harker at once; and then Patsy, with Foster in the seat beside him, once more took up the chase across the railroad.

"How far, Foster, do you suppose those machines could have gone with the amount of gasoline you left them?" Patsy asked presently.

"I should say five miles at the most; perhaps not so far as that."

"And where would that take them along the road they are traveling?"

"Nowhere at all. There isn't another place this side of Seaver's where they could get gasoline. If I was going to make a guess about it, I should say that they would about get stalled along a road like this, with only an occasional house in sight."

"Then probably what we will find will be an abandoned machine—or two machines—before very long. Watson will go ahead afoot in order to hide Miss Marincroft somewhere. Or he will go to some farmhouse and hire a horse to take him to Seaver's."

"I think that is about what he will do."

"It is evident to me, Foster, that Watson had determined to shake the rest of the crowd. He was not in the card-room when the fight began. The bartender had come to the door to call Jamison, and don't you remember that he said that Watson wanted him?"

"Yes."

"Well, I believe that Watson wanted to square his personal account on the quiet, take the Packard, and skip. That is just about what he was up to at that time."

"I shouldn't wonder if that's so."

"And of course he heard the beginning of the row—when the bartender called for help."

"Sure."

"Well, don't you see what he did then? He got the negro to help him; they took Cozine down the front stairs, out at the front door, put her into the Packard, and started away while we were having that scrap in the card-room. He was probably a mile or two away by the time the fire broke out so that he could see it."

"Easily that."

"And the others could not have gotten away in the Pierce Arrow until about the time I was jumping off of that piazza roof to escape the fire. By Jove! That is where that pistol-shot came from."

"I guess that's right, too."

"They were just escaping at that time. They heard me smash the window, and saw me jump out on the roof."

"And one of them took a shot at you from the back seat—from the tonneau, eh?"

"That's it. It was too dark then for them to follow Watson's tracks, although they did take the same road; but—— Hello! There is one of the machines, Foster."

True enough. They had rounded a bend in the road and come upon the Pierce Arrow, where it had been [illegible]. It had been pushed into the gutter to be out of the way of traffic, and left there to its fate, or until some one should be sent after it. The men who had been with it were nowhere to be seen.

"It is evident," said Patsy, as they started on again, "that the Packard had more gasoline than the Arrow; but I don't think we will have to go much farther before we find it. I would like to know where the men from the Arrow went to? There are no tracks along the road to show that they kept on this way."

"You can take it for granted, Patsy, that they crossed the fields to the other highway. It is only about a mile across—but, it would be a short cut to Seaver's at that."

A little way farther they rounded another bend in the road and came upon the Packard, which had been pushed to one side, as the other machine had been, to get it out of the way.

Foster stopped the Autocar and got down.

"Stay where you are, Foster, a minute," he said. "I want to study this business a little."

When he climbed back into the Autocar five minutes later he said to Foster:

"It is just as I supposed. The juice gave out here and Watson left Cozine in charge of the negro while he went back to hire a horse and wagon—or to buy one, if he couldn't hire. He is shrewd enough to have known that the gasoline had been stolen purposely. Do you see those tracks ahead of us?"

"Sure."

"Well, don't you see the marks of the nigger's feet? And don't you see that the horse was running?"

"Sure."

All that proves that Watson secured only a buggy—a vehicle in which only two could ride, and that the nigger clung to the backband of the harness and ran alongside of the horse. Watson found a horse—probably at that farmer's there—and drove back to the stalled Packard after Cozine. If I thought it was worth while I would stop and question that farmer; but I think we can do better by [illegible] as we are."

"How far are we now from Seaver's?"

"Just about six miles."

"Is it on this road?"

"No. It isn't on any road. It is away off the road, on a lane—a winding lane that leads to it. It isn't a road-house, Patsy; it isn't the sort of place where automobiles stop unless they are expected. It is a gambling-house pure and simple."

"I see. Then it is likely to be the very place for which Watson would head."

"Exactly. I wouldn't have thought of it myself if old Jamison hadn't suggested it; and unless these tracks show that Watson turned into the lane neither of us would ever have thought of stopping there to look for him. But Watson may easily get a can of gasoline of Seaver—enough to bring the Packard up; and then he could replenish his tank and go on at his leisure. That is just about what he will try to do, too. He knows that the country is getting pretty hot for him around here."

They rode on in silence after that for some time—in fact, until they were approaching the entrance to the winding lane which leads to Seaver's place.

"There it is," said Foster, pointing ahead. "There is the entrance to the lane."

Patsy slowed the Autocar down to a very moderate pace, so that it was barely moving when they came to the lane; but, to their surprise, the wheel-tracks they had been following, with the tracks of the negro beside them, continued in a straight line, directly past the lane, and seemed to go on indefinitely.

"Evidently he wasn't going to Seaver's, after all," said Patsy.

"Evidently not," assented Foster.

"And yet," continued the young detective, "I somehow think he was. I have an idea that driving past the entrance to the lane was done for a blind. He knows that he will be followed sooner or later, and it was light enough by the time he got here for him to know that he was leaving a pretty clear trail. Look there!"

Patsy brought the Autocar to a sudden stop and pointed at the road ahead of them.

They could see where the horse had been brought to a stop; they could see where the negro had come back to the buggy, and beyond was where the horse had started on again at a run.

"Plain as the nose on your face," said Patsy.

"How is that?" asked Foster.

"He stopped the horse long enough to have the nigger hit him a clip on the jaw, and then he whipped the horse into a run along the road; and, having done that, he took a flying leap into the ditch and left the horse and buggy to take care of themselves."

"And after that they made for Seaver's on foot."

"That is exactly what they did."

Patsy stopped the car and backed it around.

"We are going straight to Seaver's now, Foster," he said, "and there are only two of us. In all likelihood there will be eight or ten or even more for us to face when we get there, but we're going to do it, Foster—we're going to do it."

"You bet your sweet life we are, Patsy!"

CHAPTER XI.

PATSY GETS A MOVE ON HIM.

The sun was now shining brightly over the world, and it seemed almost incredible that so much that was wicked and unseemly could have happened so recently.

Patsy, having turned the machine about, sped back to the lane, when he turned in along the winding and narrow road which led to Seaver's.

"Are you going to run directly up to the house itself?" asked Foster.

"No; I don't think so. Do you know this road well?"

"Yes."

"Then I want you to tell me when we are approaching the last turn before the house comes into view. When we get there I will turn the machine around and get her ready for a quick start if we happen to want to make a get-away. After that we will approach the house on foot."

"And then——? What are you going to do then?"

"Well, I think we had better wait till we get to the bridges before we try to cross them. My idea now is to walk straight up to the house door and to try to see if I can open it with any of the tools I have got in my pocket. If it is a gambling-house they ought all to be rather sleepy about now."

"Yes. They would be only that Watson and those others have probably got them thoroughly awake by this time."

"All the same, I guess it then will be keeping a watch-out—yet. They'll be moving a few drinks and talking it over. There is one thing worth considering. I don't think that Seaver will permit any shooting if he can prevent it. He is mighty particular about rows at his place. Of course, if Watson can draw a bead on you he'll shoot you and take his chances. That goes without saying; but he won't if Seaver can prevent it."

"What sort of a man is Seaver?"

"He's a typical gambler—as cold-blooded as a snake. Shall I tell you what my idea is?"

"Yes."

"I think they will see us coming and do the concealment act."

"Eh?"

"It would be Seaver's way to hide Watson and the girl, and the nigger, too, and then swear that they are not there. And you can bet your life that he has got a hiding-place that is hard to find. His place has been raided three times, and never an implement of gambling has been found there yet. I think you will find that the game will be something like that, Patsy."

"I shouldn't wonder if you are right."

"Perhaps it would be a good idea to ride right up to the house in the Autocar."

"No. I don't think so. I will adhere to my original purpose about that."

"Then be sure to take your plug with you when you leave it, or Watson may do the 'get-away' with the machine."

"You may be sure that I will do that, Foster."

"Well, here is where you want to leave it, then, and here is a good place to turn her around."

Three minutes later they were proceeding together on foot toward Seaver's house; and now for the first time they had a good look at each other.

"Gee!" said Patsy. "You look as if you had been working in a coal-dump, Foster. Your face is blackened, your mustache is half-burned off, there is a blister on the end of your nose, and your eyes are as red as a mad bull's."

"Well, you're not much better. You have no hat on your head, your hair is singed so that it curls at the ends, there is a welt over your right eye that looks as if you had been hit with a capstan bar, there is blood on your right ear, and—*say! are you wounded?* There is a bullet-hole in the left shoulder of your coat, man!"

"It's only a scratch. It just grazed me, I think. I felt it when it hit me, but I had totally forgotten it. So it can't amount to anything."

They had come to a stop in order to make these comments on their personal appearance, but now they continued on their way and in another moment came in sight of the house.

It was a large white, frame house, standing in the middle of a glade. A piazza ran the entire length of it—and standing on the piazza in full view of them, as they came over the brow of the little hill and around the turn, was Watson.

But he disappeared through the open door the instant they showed themselves, and two men who had been talking with him remained to receive the new arrivals.

"I'll do the talking, Foster, and you keep your eyes peeled," said Patsy, in a low tone; and then strode forward.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said to the two men pleasantly. "I would like to have a word with that man who passed inside the door just as we appeared. His name is Watson. Would you mind asking him to come out for a moment?"

"There isn't anybody by that name here, young man," was the calm reply, made by one of the men whom Patsy rightly judged to be Seaver himself. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name, sir, is Patrick Garvan. I am an assistant to Nick Carter, of whom you have possibly heard. There is a man named Watson here, and he has brought with him a young lady, whom he abducted from her home. I——"

"Look here, young man! I said there ain't anybody here by that name. Didn't you hear me?"

"Oh, yes. I heard you. I said there *is*. Didn't you hear me?"

"Do you mean to call me a liar?"

"That as you please, sir."

Seaver took one quick step forward, as if it were his intention to descend to where Patsy was standing; but Patsy coolly drew his pistol and pointed it at him.

"I didn't intend to show this, Mr. Seaver," he said pleasantly, "and I'll put it away again at once if you say so. However, I know you don't like firearms around your place. But I want to tell you one thing. It won't do you any good to protect that man Watson—it will only do you harm. If you *do* protect him, I will put you and your place out of business, and if I don't do it Nick Carter will. You are a fool, Seaver—worse than a fool, to stand for such a scoundrel as that man is. Will you treat fair, and shall I put this gun away, or——"

"Put it away. I don't want any shooting or any fighting of any kind around here."

"Then give up Watson and the young woman whom he brought here with him."

"I tell you they are not here."

"And I tell you again that you are a liar, Seaver."

The gambler turned livid, but he made no move; and Patsy continued:

"And I tell you that I'll find them, and have them out of here if I have to gut your house from roof to cellar. One house has been gutted already in this search, and one more won't make much difference. You have got the rest of that gang here, right now, too. They crossed the fields below here after their automobile got stalled, and they're here now."

There was a commotion inside the door, and five blackened men, some of them with blood upon them, stalked silently out upon the piazza; and the foremost of them spoke:

"Well, what are you going to do about it if we are here? What have you got to do with us, anyhow?" he demanded.

"I've got nothing to do with you, and I don't want anything to do with you—and I think you have had about all that's coming to you. You are the five jackasses who met Watson at Jamison's, and I guess you're sorry by this time. All you've got to do is to go way back and sit down, and nobody will hurt you."

Foster grinned, and even Seaver permitted the ghost of a smile to flicker about the corners of his mouth Patsy continued:

"There were eight in your party altogether: you five, Watson, and the two who were with him? Where are they?"

"We don't know where Watson and the girl and the nigger are; the two others—well, we left them in the card-room at Jamison's when we came away. I guess they're there yet—what is left of them."

For an instant Patsy was staggered, but it was only for an instant.

"What do you stand for a scoundrel like Watson for?" he demanded.

"We're not standing for him. He shook us. We don't know anything about him."

"Don't you suppose I know better than that? Don't

you know that I *know* you're lying? There, now; drop that. If you or any one of you reaches for a weapon I've got this one very handy, and I'll drop that man where he stands—and I'll shoot to kill, too, if I shoot at all. I am not here to be bluffed. Seaver, it is up to you! Are you going to give up the people I want or are you not?"

"How can I give them up when I know nothing about them? I don't want any trouble here——"

"Maybe you don't; but it's coming to you mighty swift."

Suddenly Patsy stepped one pace backward, and then before anybody guessed what he was about to do he lifted his voice and shouted:

"Cozine! Answer me!"

Instantly there came an answering cry from somewhere in the interior of the building. It was quickly stifled, but it was nevertheless unmistakable, and it roused Patsy as nothing else could have done.

With a quick leap forward, he fired two shots from his pistol—not with the intention of hitting anybody, but to make them scatter out of his way, so that he could pass through the door.

And his ruse succeeded.

All five of the men dodged out of the way, leaving the opening that Patsy aimed for, and in an instant he was up the steps and through the door, inside the house.

And then, as quick as a flash, he banged the heavy door shut behind him and shot the bolt into place, and in another instant he had picked up a huge oaken bar and dropped it into place across the door.

He knew that he had left Foster out there alone with seven men against him, but he rightly judged that Foster was perfectly capable of taking care of himself; and also he guessed that it would not occur to the men to attack him. Their concern would be for himself, who was inside.

Patsy did not suppose that he could keep them out of the house. He knew that there were other entrances by which they could gain admittance; but he also realized that two or three minutes must pass before they could get to him.

His purpose was to keep them from following him at once, and in that he succeeded.

And the moment he had put the bar in place across the door he shouted again:

"Cozine! Cozine! Cozine! It is Patsy who calls. Cozine! Answer me if you can."

Somewhere below him he heard a muffled sound, as if she were struggling to answer, and was prevented from doing so, and he knew then that the place where they had her hidden was in the cellar, or in some vault adjoining it.

"Watson," he called out, "bring your prisoner up here to me unharmed and I'll let you go. Refuse, and I'll kill you if I get the chance!"

There was no reply this time; no sound of any sort.

Suddenly Patsy took a new tack. He pressed against the door he had lately barred, so that he could lift away the bar silently; then he did the same thing in shooting back the bolt, and then with great suddenness he threw the door wide open and leaped out upon the piazza.

"Hands up, every one of you!" he ordered. "Hands up, or I'll shoot to kill!"

They were taken utterly by surprise, and their hands went into the air with startling unanimity.

"Now, stand as you are," ordered Patsy. "The first one who attempts to lower his hands gets a bullet in him. Foster!"

"Yes, sir. At your service," was the prompt reply.

"Go through the bunch and take their weapons away. I think I know what to do with this case now!"

CHAPTER XII.

PATSY'S SPLENDID STRATEGY.

There was a grin of intense amusement on Foster's face as he proceeded to comply with Patsy's order; and he did it thoroughly.

"All clear," he said presently.

"Now, Foster," continued Patsy, "go inside the house and pull down half a dozen pictures from the walls. Seaver, if you move I'll bore you!—and bring the cords out here. Just hurry, will you?"

Foster was gone a surprisingly short time for what he accomplished, and he returned with his hands filled with picture-cords.

"Now, you five blacklegs," said Patsy, "there are six posts along the front of this piazza. They will do for you five and for this bartender of Seaver's. Sit down with your legs around the posts. Quick, now! And all of you. I have got through fooling. I'm in deadly earnest, as you will find out to your cost if you don't do as I say. That's right. Now, you! And you! And you! And you! And you! Now, Seaver, you get over there

saving you for something else. Now, Foster, wire their ankles together, so they can't get up, and fasten their wrists together behind their backs. That's the idea."

One by one the men were fastened as he described, with their legs astride of the piazza posts and with their hands behind them, so that it was impossible for one of them to alter his position. It was a very strange scene, and had it been less tragic it would have been ludicrous.

"Any more wire left, Foster?" asked Patsy, when that was all done, and Seaver was still standing erect upon the piazza.

"Plenty."

"Do you see that cherry-tree out there, Foster?"

"I sure do, Patsy."

"Take Seaver out there, back him up against it, and wire him fast so that he can't move so much as an inch."

"All right, sir. Consider it done."

"For Heaven's sake, what are you going to do with me?" gasped the now thoroughly frightened Seaver.

"I'll show you in a minute, Seaver. Don't fret," was Patsy's grim reply. "Go ahead, Foster. Don't waste time. Tie him so he can't move. Hurt him a little if necessary in order to make him stand still. That's the idea. Now, put another wire around the tree at his throat, but not so that it will choke him at all. That's the idea. Draw his arms a little tighter around the tree. So. That's right. Now stand aside, Foster. Come over here near me."

Seaver's paled features were now livid. He was thoroughly frightened.

"Now, Seaver," said Patsy, "listen to me. Do you see this pistol? I suppose you do. Well, I am a very good shot with a pistol, and I am about to use you as a target. I am not going to hit you—don't think that. I am much too good a shot to do that. *But I am going to try to see how close I can come to you without hitting you.* Like that!"

He fired as he ceased speaking, and the bullet clipped off a bit of bark close beside Seaver's head.

"I did that just to give you an illustration of what I intend to do, Seaver," said Patsy, smiling at him benignantly. "I am going to keep up this target-practice until you tell me how to find that hiding-place, somewhere in your cellar, or adjoining it, where Watson and the young lady was concealed. Like that!" and he fired a second time.

"For Heaven! raise, stop!" begged Seaver in agony.

"Are you prepared to tell me what I want to know, Seaver?"

"I tell you that I don't——"

Bang! went the third shot, and another piece of bark was chipped away close to Seaver's ear.

"I'll tell you! I'll tell you, if you'll only stop!" yelled Seaver.

Patsy dropped the muzzle of his pistol and strode over to him.

"All right," he said. "Tell me."

"Let me loose and I'll show you."

"No. Tell me how to find it, and I'll do it myself. If you lie to me I will want to use you as a target again."

"It's—it's—under the dining-room. There is a sideboard there that looks as if it was built into the wall—looks as if it was a fixture there."

"Yes. Go on."

"Pull out the top drawer—away out, as far as it will come. Then take hold of the sideboard at the right-hand end and pull it away from the wall. That is all there is to it. You will find the rest yourself."

"All right, Seaver. Watson is in there, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"And the young lady?"

"Yes."

"Anybody else?"

"No."

"Can you hear, in there, what we are talking about out here?"

"No; it is a wonder that the girl heard you when you shouted from the outside."

"Then it isn't likely that Watson has any idea of what is going on out here, is it?"

"No."

"Couldn't he have come out himself to listen?"

"No; once in there with the place closed there is no way of opening it save from the outside. He has got to stay there now till somebody releases him."

"That's all right. Now, Foster."

"All ready, general—and by thunder you *are* a general all right!"

"You stay here and keep tabs on this bunch, while I do the rest. They can't get away, but somebody might come."

"Oh, I'll watch 'em all right. But say, Patsy, look out for that snake that's down there."

"I'll look out for him."

Patsy entered the house without more words. He went directly to the dining-room, and to what appeared to be a stationary sideboard set into the wall. He pulled out the top drawer, as he had been directed to do, and then pulled upon the sideboard itself.

At once it swung away from the wall, disclosing a wide opening and a narrow flight of stairs.

And Patsy stepped quickly backward, out of view, and then, in a very good imitation of the voice of Seaver, he called out:

"It's all right, Watson. Come out."

Watson, unsuspectingly, ran up the stairs; and the instant that his shoulders were above the floor Patsy leaped upon him.

All the pent-up rage of the last sixteen hours was in that leap and the blow that followed it; but Watson, stronger than Patsy had supposed, turned with a snarl. But Patsy was already choking him into submission, and in this way they struggled across the floor of the dining-room, out of it into the hall, and thence out upon the piazza, where a last blow behind Watson's ear dazed him.

As soon as they appeared Foster ran to them and seized Watson with his great hands.

"What shall I do with him, Patsy?" he asked.

"Strip him down to his shirt, and tie him to that other cherry-tree—with his face to it," was Patsy's grim order; and he turned and hurried back into the house, through the dining-room, and down the stairs into the secret vault.

And there, among the débris of gambling implements, he found Cozine—unconscious.

With great tenderness he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the room above; and there he saw that she had only fainted from terror and exhaustion; and, knowing that in a few moments she would open her eyes again, he pressed his lips to her forehead, and, having placed her upon a couch that was in the room, he went out again to where Foster had tied Watson with his face to the cherry-tree.

Foster had done more. He had anticipated what Patsy wished to do, and he had been to the stable and found a horsewhip.

"Here," he said, giving it to Patsy. "I wish you would let me do it."

"No; I will attend to it, thank you," was the grim reply.

So intent were they upon what was taking place that not one of them heard the droning of an approaching automobile that was coming nearer and nearer with every moment.

"Watson," said Patsy sternly, "I am going to give you a lash for every hour you have made Miss Marincroft suffer; and here goes!"

The heavy horsewhip fell with all the savage strength that Patsy could put into it across the shoulders and back that were protected only by a thin shirt; and Patsy counted as he struck, one for every hour that had passed since ten o'clock the preceding morning—and it was now seven o'clock.

At first Watson squirmed and cursed; then he moaned; then he screamed; but Patsy kept relentlessly on until he arrived at fifteen, when two soft arms were thrown around his neck and Cozine sobbed into his ear:

"Please don't, Patsy! Please don't, dear!"

He threw the whip aside and took her in his arms just as a big Peerless car dashed into the glade and Nick Carter and Chick leaped to the ground beside him.

* * * * * * *

This is the end of the story.

Nick had kept to the main highway in trying to head off the Packard, and for some reason had not been able to get telephonic connection with Garrity. The result was that he and Chick had been all the way to Trenton and back again. But coming back they had got on the right track, and Nick had seen where the Autocar had turned into the lane that morning. He arrived just at the climax.

Alexander Archibald Watson was found to be a genuine crook who posed as a detective. How he had succeeded in fooling the authorities of a great city does not appear. He was sent to prison for a long term for his various crimes.

Foster received his five hundred, and more, too; and so did Harker, who speedily recovered from his injuries.

And Cozine? She was taken to Nick Carter's house, where she could rest for a day, for it was nearer than her own home, and then Patsy drove her back again to Ardsley in the Autocar.

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY (547) will contain "A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime."

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Never has Burt L. Standish written such interesting tales of the adventures of the Merriwell brothers, Frank and Dick, as are now appearing in this weekly. Mr. Standish has a world-wide circle of friends and he is putting forth his best efforts to amuse and entertain them. Boys, you have no idea of what a grand feast he is preparing for you. Tip Top's stories are going to astonish you. Do not fail to buy this library.

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578—Dick Merriwell's Coach; or, Pride and Prejudice.
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RANCH AND RANGE LIFE

should be, and whether these stories by Mr. Ned Taylor fill the bill. We believe they stand in a class by themselves; and from many a Western cattle State we daily receive letters full of praise and enthusiasm for the work of

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which letters are written by those entirely familiar with life on the prairie ranches, and who would laugh to scorn stories by an author whom they knew never could have ridden a bucking bronco. Make up your mind to try for these golden prizes right away. Even if you fail to secure one of the twenty leading prizes, we expect to send a splendid consolation offering to every one who competes. Let us know in what way these tales of the Wild West appeal to you, and what you have done to influence your boy pards to read them regularly.

¶ The competition is open from April 1 until October 1, 1907, when the prizes will be awarded, full name and address of every winner being published in the **Rough Rider Weekly.**

HERE ARE THE PRIZES

$10 in Gold for the Best Letter.
$5 in Gold for Each of the Three Next Best Letters.
$2.50 in Gold for Each of the Six Next Best Letters.
$1 in Gold for Each of the Ten Next Best Letters.

¶ The letters should not be longer than 250 words and should be plainly addressed to "Manager of Rough Rider Letter Competition," care of Street & Smith. Now, boys, jump in and resolve to win a cash prize.

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How the Early Numbers of the TIP TOP WEEKLY May Be Secured

TO the boys who take interest in the adventures of Frank Merriwell and want to read everything that was written about him, we desire to say that numbers 1 to 325 of the **Tip Top Weekly** containing his early adventures are entirely out of stock and will not be reprinted. These numbers, however, were published in the Medal Library beginning with No. 150 which is entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all the Merriwell stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing.

We will send a complete catalogue of the Medal Library, which is just full of good things for boys, on receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
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197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
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395—Frank Merriwell's Victories.
398—Frank Merriwell's Iron Nerve.
401—Frank Merriwell in Kentucky.
404—Frank Merriwell's Power.
407—Frank Merriwell's Shrewdness.
410—Frank Merriwell's Set-back.

Published About May 27th

413—Frank Merriwell's Search.

Published About June 17th

416—Frank Merriwell's Club.

Published About July 9th

419—Frank Merriwell's Trust.

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422—Frank Merriwell's False Friend.

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